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THE WORKS

Of the Moſt Reverend

Dr. John Tillotſon,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

VOLUME the SECOND.

CONTAINING

Two Hundred Sermons and Diſcourſes,

On SEVERAL OCCASIONS:

Publiſhed from the Originals

By *RALPH BARKER*, D. D. Chaplain to his Grace.

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H

IMPRIMATUR,

Febr. 16.
169$\frac{4}{5}$.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

Tho. Cantuar.

TO

His SACRED MAJESTY

King WILLIAM,

THESE

SERMONS

ARE

Moſt humbly Dedicated,

By the Author's Relict,

ELIZ. TILLOTSON.

THE PUBLISHER TO THE READER.

THE AUTHOR *of theſe Sermons was ſo well known, particularly for his moſt excellent and uſeful diſcourſes from the Pulpit, that I ſhall not attempt, by any thing I can ſay, to recommend them to the publick. I know very well, they have already that credit in the world, which will render any apology needleſs; eſpecially when, by this publication of them, they ſhall ſpeak for themſelves.*

I think it requiſite, only to aſſure the reader, that they are what they pretend to be, the genuine works *of* that great man.

Whilſt I had the happineſs of converſing with him, he was pleas'd (at my requeſt) to inſtruct me in the character *in which he wrote all his Sermons: and ſome of theſe now publiſhed, having been tranſcribed by me ſome years ſince, were found amongſt his papers, corrected with his own hand.*

By what he had been pleas'd to ſay, that I was maſter of his character, *and by the few* errata *he obſerv'd in my firſt performance, I was encouraged to ſet about this work; in which I can ſolemnly profeſs, that I have obſerved a religious care and ſtrictneſs, neither to omit nor add any thing, but an of,* a the, *or the like, when the ſenſe plainly required it; and of that too I have given notice, by affixing this mark (") upon the word which I did not find in the original; ſo that the reader is left to judge of the fitneſs of ſuch additions; which, after all, are ſo very few and inconſiderable,* *as ſcarcely to deſerve this notice; only that he might be ſatisfied (in caſe the Printer do his part) that he hath here, what he expects, a perfect tranſcript of theſe* Sermons; *and in them a true aud lively ſtrain of* chriſtian piety and eloquence, *ſo fitted to all capacities, that I cannot but hope, all that ſhall read them will be the better for them, even thoſe not excepted (if there be any ſuch) who may have entertain'd any unreaſonable prejudices againſt them, or their* moſt reverend author.

I have always thought, and often ſaid it, that if any were leaven'd with prejudice againſt him, they were, to be ſure, ſuch as did not know him; and the farther I go in his writings, the more I am aſſured that it muſt be ſo. But becauſe the Sermons themſelves, to which I refer, are not yet all of them publiſhed, I muſt leave this to the judgment of the impartial Reader, when the whole ſhall be finiſh'd, which is deſign'd with all convenient ſpeed.

Lambeth,
April 2, 1695.

Ra. Barker.

The BOOKSELLERS to the READER.

THE *foregoing preface was prefix'd by Dr.* Barker *to the firſt of the fourteen volumes in* octavo; *and the reception they have all met with in the world, ſhews he was very juſt in his* character. *The whole two hundred Sermons and Diſcourſes are included in theſe two volumes in* folio; *And all the Indexes have been carefully examin'd and fitted to the pages, which were defective in ſome of the* octavo *volumes, eſpecially the eleventh. Theſe, with fifty four Sermons and Diſcourſes, and the* rule of faith, *in anſwer to Mr.* Serjeant's ſure footing, *publiſh'd in his* Grace's *life-time, and ſince eight times reprinted in* folio, *make three volumes; and compleat his works.*

THE

THE TEXTS OF EACH SERMON in this VOLUME.

SERM. I. Of Sincerity towards God and Man.

John i. 47. *Jeſus ſaw Nathanael coming to him, and ſaith of him, Behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom is no guile.* Page 1

SERM. II. The excellency of *Abraham*'s Faith and Obedience.

Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19. *By Faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Iſaac: and he that had received the promiſes offered up his only begotten ſon: of whom it was ſaid, that in Iſaac ſhall thy ſeed be called: accounting that God was able to raiſe him up, even from the dead; from whence alſo he received him in a figure.* p. 9.

SERM. III. *Moſes*'s choice of afflicted Piety, rather than a Kingdom.

Heb. xi. 24, 25. *By faith Moſes, when he was come to years, refuſed to be called the ſon of Pharaoh's Daughter; chooſing rather to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon.* p. 18

SERM. IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX. Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

Heb. x. 23. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promiſed.* p. 26, 32, 38, 44, 51, 58

SERM. X. The Chriſtian Life, a Life of Faith.

2 Cor. v. 7. *For we walk by faith, not by ſight.* p. 65

SERM. XI. The Danger of Apoſtaſy from the true Religion.

Heb. x. 38. *But if any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him.* p. 71

SERM. XII, XIII. Of Self-denial, and ſuffering for Chriſt's Sake.

Matt. xvi. 24. *Then ſaid Jeſus unto his Diſciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me.* p. 78, 84

SERM. XIV, XV. Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth.

Heb. xi. 13. *And confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the Earth.* p. 90, 96

SERM. XVI.

SERM. XVI. The Preſence of the *Meſſias*, the Glory of the ſecond Temple.

Hag. ii. 6, 7, 8, 9. *For thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, yet once, it is a little while and I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land: And I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come, and I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the lord of hoſts. The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of hoſts. The glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the lord of hoſts; and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the lord of hoſts.* p. 101

SERM. XVII, XVIII, XIX. Chriſt Jeſus the only Mediator between God and Men.

1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and Men, the man Chriſt Jeſus; who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.* p. 109, 114, 119

SERM. XX. The general and effectual Publication of the Goſpel by the Apoſtles.

Mark xvi. 19, 20. *So then after the Lord had ſpoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and ſat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with ſigns following.* p. 126

SERM. XXI. The Nature, Office, and Employment of good Angels.

Heb. i. 14. *Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?* p. 133

SERM. XXII. The Reputation of good Men after Death.

Pſalm. cxii. 6. the latter part of the verſe. *The righteous ſhall be in everlaſting Remembrance.* p. 142

SERM. XXIII. The Duty of imitating the primitive Teachers and Patterns of Chriſtianity.

Heb. xiii. 7. the latter part of the verſe. *Whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation.* The whole verſe runs thus: *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have ſpoken unto you the word of God; whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation.* p. 147

SERM. XXIV. The Encouragement to ſuffer for Chriſt; and the Danger of denying him.

2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. *It is a faithful ſaying; for if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him: If we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him: If we deny him, he alſo will deny us.* p. 153

SERM. XXV, XXVI. The Bleſſedneſs of good Men after Death.

Rev. xiv. 13. *And I heard a voice from heaven, ſaying unto me, Write, bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them.* p. 159, 165

SERM. XXVII. The vanity and wickedneſs of honouring dead Saints, and Perſecuting the living.

Luke xi. 49, 50, 51. *Therefore alſo ſaid the wiſdom of God; I will ſend them Prophets and Apoſtles, and ſome of them they ſhall ſlay and perſecute: that the blood of all the Prophets, which was ſhed from the foundation of the World, may be required of this Generation: from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which periſhed between the altar and the temple: Verily I ſay unto you, it ſhall be required of this generation.* p. 171

SERM. XXVIII. The Danger of Zeal without Knowledge.

Rom. x. 2. *I bear them record, that they have a Zeal of God: but not according to Knowledge.* p. 175

SERM. XXIX. The beſt Men liable to the worſt Treatment, from miſtaken Zealots.

John xvi. 2. *They ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues: Yea, the time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you will think that he doth God ſervice.* p. 181

SERM. XXX. The Duty and Reaſon of praying for Governors.

1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. *I exhort therefore, that firſt of all ſupplications, prayers, interceſſions, and giving of thanks, be made for all Men: for Kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godlineſs and honeſty.* p. 187

SERM. XXXI. The Love of God to Men in the Incarnation of Chriſt.

1 John iv. 9. *In this was manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe that God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* p. 194

SERM. XXXII. The Sin and Danger of adding to the Doctrine of the Goſpel.

Galat. i. 8, 9. *But though we, or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.* p. 200

SERM. XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXV. Honeſty the beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous Miſtakes in Religion.

John vii. 17. *If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.* p. 206, 211, 217

SERM. XXXVI. The Nature of Covetouſneſs.

Luke xii. 15. *And he ſaid unto them, take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* p. 222

SERM. XXXVII, XXXVIII, XXXIX. The Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

Luke xii. 15. *And he ſaid unto them, take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a Man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* p. 228, 233, 239

SERM. XL, XLI. Religion, our firſt and great Concernment.

Matth. vi. 33. *But ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.* p. 245, 251

SERM. XLII. The Wiſdom of Religion.

Pſal. cxix. 96. *I have ſeen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.* p. 257

SERM. XLIII, XLIV. The Nature and Influence of the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

2 Pet. i. 4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.* p. 264, 269

SERM. XLV, XLVI. The Support of good Men under their Sufferings for Religion.

1 Pet. iv. 19. *Wherefore, let them that ſuffer according to the Will of God commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* p. 273, 283

SERM. XLVII. Of the Work aſſign'd to every Man, and the Seaſon for doing it.

John ix. 4. *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work.* p. 289

SERM. XLVIII. Of the great Duties of natural Religion, with the Ways and Means of knowing them.

Micah vi. 6, 7, 8. *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with Burnt-Offerings, with calves of a Year old?*
Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? ſhall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?
He hath ſhewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? p. 295

SERM. XLIX. Inſtituted Religion not intended to undermine Natural.

Matth. ix. 13. *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice.* p. 304

SERM.

SERM. L, LI. **Chriſtianity doth not deſtroy, but perfect the Law of *Moſes*.**

Matth. v. 17. *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the prophets, I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil.* p. 313, 319

SERM. LII, LIII, LIV, LV, LVI. **Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Neceſſity, in order to Juſtification and Salvation.**

Galat. vi. 15. *For in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature.* p. 324, 329, 334, 339, 344

SERM. LVII, LVIII. **The Danger of all known Sin, both from the Light of Nature and Revelation.**

Rom. i. 18, 19. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them; for God hath ſhewed it unto them.* p. 349, 357

SERM. LIX. **Knowledge and Practice neceſſary in Religion.**

John xiii. 17. *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* p. 365

SERM. LX. **Practice in Religion neceſſary, in proportion to our Knowledge.**

Luke xii. 47, 48. *And that Servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes. For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* p. 371

SERM. LXI, LXII. **The Sins of Men not chargeable upon God; but upon themſelves.**

James i. 13, 14. *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.* p. 377, 387

SERM. LXIII. **Proving Jeſus to be the *Meſſias*.**

Matth. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. *Now when* John *had heard in priſon the works of Chriſt, he ſent two of his diſciples, and ſaid unto him, art thou he that ſhall come: or do we look for another? Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, Go and ſhew* John *again thoſe things which you do hear, and ſee. The blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the poor have the Goſpel preached unto them. And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* p. 394

SERM. LXIV. **The Prejudices againſt Chriſtianity conſider'd.**

Matth. xi. 6. *And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* p. 404

SERM. LXV. The prejudices againſt Jeſus and his religion conſidered.

Matt. xi. 6. *And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* p. 413

SERM. LXVI. Jeſus the Son of God, prov'd by his reſurrection.

Rom. i. 4. *And declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holineſs, by the reſurrection from the dead.* p. 420

SERM. LXVII. The danger of apoſtaſy from chriſtianity.

Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6. *For it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightned, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they ſhall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame.* p. 426

SERM. LXVIII. Chriſt the author, and obedience the condition of ſalvation.

Heb. v. 9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey him.* p. 435

SERM. LXIX. The poſſibility and neceſſity of goſpel-obedience, and its conſiſtence with free grace.

Text, *Ibid.* p. 443

SERM. LXX. The authority of Jeſus Chriſt, with the commiſſion and promiſe which he gave to his apoſtles.

Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. *And Jeſus came and ſpake unto them, ſaying, All power is given unto me in heaven, and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you: And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* p. 451

SERM. LXXI. The difficulties of a chriſtian life conſider'd.

Luke xiii. 24. *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* p. 459

SERM. LXXII, LXXIII. The parable of the rich man and *Lazarus.*

Luke xvi. 19, 20. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day: and there was a certain beggar, named* Lazarus, *which was laid at his gate full of ſores.* p. 468, 476

SERM. LXXIV. The parable of the rich man and *Lazarus.*

Luke xvi. 31. *If they hear not* Moſes *and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.* p. 485

SERM. LXXV. The children of this world wiſer than the children of light.

Luke xvi. 8. *For the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light.* p. 481

SERM. LXXVI. Concerning the perfection of God.

Matth. v. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* p. 490

SERM. LXXVII. Concerning our imitation of the divine perfections.

Text, *Ibid.* p. 505

SERM. LXXVIII. The happineſs of God.

1 Tim. i. 11. *The bleſſed God.* The whole verſe runs thus: *According to the glorious Goſpel of the bleſſed God, which was committed to my truſt.* p. 514

SERM. LXXIX. The unchangeableneſs of God.

James i. 17. *With whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.* The whole period runs thus: *Do not err, my beloved brethren: Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.* p. 521

SERM. LXXX, LXXXI. The knowledge of God.

1 Sam. ii. 3. *The Lord is a God of knowledge.* p. 527, 535

SERM. LXXXII. The wiſdom, glory, and ſovereignty of God.

Jude 25. *To the only wiſe God our Saviour, be glory and majeſty, dominion and power, now, and ever.* p. 543

SERM. LXXXIII. The wiſdom of God in the creation of the world.

Pſalm civ. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.* p. 551

SERM. LXXXIV. The wiſdom of God, in his providence.

1 Pet. v. 7. *Caſting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.* p. 556

SERM. LXXXV. The wiſdom of God in the redemption of mankind.

1 Cor. i. 24.——*Chriſt, the power of God, and the wiſdom of God.* p. 564

SERM. LXXXVI. The Juſtice of God, in the diſtribution of Rewards and Puniſhments.

Gen. xviii. 25. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* p. 571

SERM. LXXXVII. The Truth of God.

Deut. xxxii. 4.——*A God of Truth.* p. 579

SERM. LXXXVIII. The Holineſs of God.

1 Pet. i. 16. *Be ye holy, for I am holy.* p. 586

SERM. LXXXIX. Of doing Good.

Galat. vi. 9, 10. *Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due Seaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not: As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, eſpecially unto them who are of the houſhold of faith.* p. 593

SERM. XC, XCI, XCII, XCIII. The Goodneſs of God.

Pſalm cxlv. 9. *The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* p. 601, 606, 612, 619

SERM. XCIV. The Mercy of God.

Num. xiv. 18. *The Lord is long-ſuffering and of great mercy.* p. 625

SERM. XCV, XCVI. The Patience of God.

2 Pet. iii. 9. *The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs; but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* p. 634, 640

SERM. XCVII, XCVIII. The long-ſuffering of God.

Eccl. viii. 9. *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.* p. 645, 658

SERM. XCIX. The Power of God.

Pſalm lxii. 11. *God hath ſpoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.* p. 662

SERM. C. The Spirituality of the Divine Nature.

John iv. 24. *God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.* p. 670

SERM. CI. The Immenſity of the Divine Nature.

Pſalm cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10. *Whither ſhall I go from thy Spirit? or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me.* p. 676

SERM. CII. The Eternity of God.

Pſalm xc. 2. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadſt formed the earth and the world, even from everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God.* p. 681

SERM. CIII. The Incomprehenſibleneſs of God.

Job xi. 7. *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* p. 686

SERM. CIV. God the firſt Cauſe, and laſt End.

Rom. xi. 36. *For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever.* Amen. p. 691

A ſhort Account of the Subjects of the ſeveral SERMONS in theſe Two VOLUMES.

In the firſt VOLUME.

SERMONS from I to Number XV. and from Page 1 to 96.

Of Sincerity and Conſtancy in the Faith and Profeſſion of the true Religion.

60--------and Diſcourſes on ſeveral Subjects and Occaſions; from Serm. XV. *to* LXXV. *and from* Page 96 *to* 490.

29 *Sermons and Diſcourſes of the Attributes of God, and one of doing Good. From* Serm. LXXV *to* CV. *and from* Page 490 *to* 696.

In the Third VOLUME.

15 SERMONS *of Repentance.* *From* CV *to* CXIX. *from* Page 1 *to* 99.

15--------*and Diſcourſes of Death, Judgment, and a ſuture State.* *From* Serm. CXIX *to* CXXXIV. *and from* Page 99 *to* 213.

15-------*Of the Life, Sufferings, Reſurrection and Aſcenſion of Chriſt, and the Operations of the Holy Ghoſt.* *From* Serm. CXXXIV *to* CXLIX. *and from* Page 213 *to* 307.

30 Sermons *and* Diſcourſes *on ſeveral Subjects and Occaſions.* *From* Serm. CXXIX *to* CXLIX. *and from* Page 307 *to* 498.

15 Sermons *of the Truth and the Excellency of the Chriſtian Religion.* *From* Serm. CLXXIX *to* CXCV. *and from* Page 498 *to* 592.

6 Sermons *on ſeveral Subjects.* *From* CXCV *to* CC, *and from* Page 592 *to* 632.

In all 200 Sermons.

Prayers on ſeveral Occaſions, &c. Page 633, &c.

*** We have plac'd the whole in the ſame order as Dr. *Barker* publiſhed them.

SERMON I.

Of Sincerity towards God and Man.

Preach'd at Kingſton, July 29, 1694. The laſt his Grace preach'd.

John i. 47.

Jeſus ſaw Nathanael coming to him, and ſaith of him, Behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

WHO this *Nathanael* was, upon whom our Saviour beſtows this extraordinary character, doth not certainly appear, his name being but once more mentioned in the whole hiſtory of the Goſpel: For certain, he was a good man, who deſerved this extraordinary commendation; and none but our Saviour, who knew what was in man, and needed not that any ſhould tell him, could have given it, eſpecially of one whom he had never ſeen before that time; for when *Jeſus ſaw him coming to him, he ſaith of him, behold an Iſraelite indeed.*

The whole nation of the *Jews* were *Iſraelites* by natural deſcent, being the ſeed of *Jacob* or *Iſrael*; but in a ſpecial and more excellent ſenſe, none are eſteem'd the true poſterity of *Iſrael*, but thoſe who reſembled this father of their nation in true piety and goodneſs; for (as the Apoſtle reaſons) *they are not all Iſrael who are of Iſrael*; they only are *Iſraelites* indeed who reſemble good old *Jacob*, in the ſincerity of his piety, and the ſimplicity of his temper and diſpoſition; for our Saviour ſeems here to allude to that character which is given of *Jacob*, (Gen. xxv. 27.) That *he was a plain man*, or, as the *Hebrew* word ſignifies, *a perfect and ſincere man*, in oppoſition to his brother *Eſau* who is ſaid to be *cunning*, ſo that to be an *Iſraelite indeed*, is to be a downright honeſt man, without fraud and guile, without any arts of hypocriſy and deceit.

In ſpeaking of this virtue of ſincerity, which is the higheſt character and commendation of a good man, I ſhall conſider it, as it reſpects God and man. As it reſpects God, ſo it imports the truth and ſincerity of our piety and devotion towards him. As it regards men, ſo it ſignifies a ſimplicity of mind and manners, in our carriage and converſation, one towards another; both theſe are included, and very probably were intended, in the character which our Saviour here gives *Nathanael.*

I. I ſhall conſider this grace, or virtue of ſincerity, as it reſpects God, and ſo it imports the truth and ſincerity of our piety towards him, that we heartily believe, and fear, and honour him, and that the outward expreſſions of our piety and obedience to him are the genuine iſſue of our inward apprehenſions of him, and affections towards him; and this no doubt, our Saviour intended, in the firſt place, in the character of this good man, that he was a man of a real and ſubſtantial and unaffected piety, and in truth, what he appeared to be; that he did ſincerely love God and his truth, and was ready to embrace it, whenever it was fairly propoſed to him, as did plainly appear in his carriage towards our Saviour; for when *Philip* invited him to *come and ſee him*, he did not conceal the prejudice and objection he had againſt him, grounded upon a common, but uncharitable proverb, that *out of* Nazareth *ariſeth no Prophet*; but having an honeſt and ſincere mind, he was not ſo carried away by a popular prejudice, as not to have patience to be better inform'd, and therefore was eaſily perſuaded to *go and ſee* our Saviour, and to diſcourſe with him himſelf, and being ſatisfied that he was the *Meſſias*, he preſently owns him for ſuch, calling him *the ſon of God, and the King of Iſrael.* And becauſe ſincerity is the very heart and ſubſtance of religion, it concerns us not only to endeavour after this temper and diſpoſition, but to enquire into the nature and properties of it, that we may know when we have it, and may have the comfort of it. I ſhall mention *five* or *ſix* properties of a ſincere piety, by which men may ſufficiently know the integrity of their hearts towards God.

1. Our piety is then ſincere, when the chief reaſons and predominant motives of it are religious; and I call *that* a religious or rational motive, which regards God and another world, in oppoſition to men, and to our preſent temporal advantages; when the principal and ſwaying motives of our piety, are a ſenſe of God's authority over us, and of our duty and obligation to him; a fear of his diſpleaſure and threatnings, and the hopes of the glorious reward which he hath promiſed to obedience; theſe motives are properly religious, becauſe they reſpect God, and are the arguments to obedience, which he himſelf offers to us, to perſuade us to our duty; and that is a ſincere piety, which is wrought in us by theſe conſiderations, how unequally ſoever mixed; for even in the moſt of men, fear does many times prevail more than love, and, in caſe of great temptation, may preſerve men from ſin, when perhaps no other conſideration will do it. On the contrary, that is an unſincere piety, to which we are moved merely by the regard of men, and the conſideration of ſome temporal advantages. And when theſe have the chief influence upon us, it is eaſy for any man to diſcern in himſelf; for he that will carefully obſerve himſelf, can hardly be ignorant of the true ſpring and motive of his own actions: But there is one ſign whereby a man may certainly know that his heart is not right towards God, and that is, if when theſe motives are abſent, our piety and zeal for the true religion doth either ceaſe, or is ſenſibly cooled and abated; as if impiety, or popery, or any thing elſe that is bad, begin to be in faſhion, and to have the countenance of great examples; if thoſe whom we fear, and upon whom we depend, do diſcover any inclination that way; if the garb of religion ceaſe to be for our intereſt, or, in the revolution of things, happen to be contrary to it: If in any of theſe caſes, we let fall the profeſſion of our religion, or neglect the practice of it, this is a plain and undeniable demonſtration of the inſincerity of our former piety.

2. A ſincere piety muſt be rooted in the heart, and be a living principle within us; for, as the Apoſtle reaſons in another caſe, *he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he who is one inwardly*, and *in the heart*; and without this, all outward acts of piety and devotion are hypocriſy, a picture of religion, and *a form of godlineſs*, without the life and power of it.

3. A third evidence of a ſincere piety is, when men are religious in private and in ſecret, as well as in publick and in the open view of men. He is truly devout, who is ſo in his family, and in his cloſet, where he hath no witneſs, but God, and his own ſoul, as well as in the church. He is a downright honeſt man, who will make good his word, and perform his promiſe, when no proof can be made of it, and no law compel him to it, as readily as if there had been an hundred witneſſes of it. He is ſincerely juſt, who will not detain from another his right, though he be ignorant of it; nor wrong any man, though he could do it with all the ſecrecy and ſafety in the world; who will not impoſe upon another's ignorance or unſkilfulneſs, tho' never ſo much to his own benefit and advantage. He is truly charitable, who would not only as ſoon, but rather ſooner give his alms in ſecret, than in the ſight of men: And he is truly grateful, who when there is occaſion and opportunity, will acknowledge a kindneſs and requite a benefit to the relations of his deceaſed friend, though he be ſure that all memory of the obligation died with him, and that none are conſcious of it, but God and his own conſcience. And indeed there is ſcarce any act of piety and virtue, the ſincerity of which may not by this evidence be known by us: As on the contrary a man may for certain conclude himſelf a hypocrite, if he be not the ſame in the preſence of God, and his own conſcience, that he is in the ſight of men.

4. Another evidence of a ſincere piety is a conſtant tenour of goodneſs in the general courſe of our lives. I do not now ſpeak of the firſt beginnings of piety, in new converts, which are many times very imperfect, and ſuch as afford little or no evidence of a man's ſincerity; but in thoſe who have made any conſiderable progreſs in goodneſs; the habits of any known ſin, and the wilful and deliberate neglect of our duties, and even the ſingle acts of more heinous crimes, will bring in queſtion our ſincerity, and are by no means to be ſhelter'd under the name of infirmity: for theſe the grace of God, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, will enable us to ſubdue; and he is not ſincerely good, who doth not ſeriouſly endeavour to be as good as he can, and does not make uſe of that

grace which God is ready to afford to all the purpoſes, tho' not of a perfect, yet of a ſincere obedience to the laws of God.

5. Another evidence of a ſincere piety is, that our obedience to God be uniform and univerſal, equally reſpecting all the laws of God, and every part of our duty; that it do not content itſelf with an eſpecial regard to ſome precepts of the law tho' never ſo conſiderable, and allow itſelf in the breach, or neglect of the reſt; no nor with obſerving the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. *James* puts this caſe, and determines, that, *he that keeps the whole law, ſaving that he offends in one point, is guilty of all*, that is, is not ſincere in his obedience to the reſt. And therefore we muſt take great heed that we do not ſet the commandments of God at odds, and daſh the two tables of the law againſt one another, leſt, as St. *James* ſays, we *break the whole law:* And yet I fear this is too common a fault, even amongſt thoſe who make a great profeſſion of piety, that they are not ſufficiently ſenſible of the obligation and neceſſity of the duties of the ſecond table, and of the excellency of thoſe graces and virtues, which reſpect our carriage and converſation with one another. Men do not ſeem to conſider, that God did not give laws to us, for his own ſake, but ours; and therefore that he did not only deſign that we ſhould honour him, but that we ſhould be happy in one another; for which reaſon he joins with our humble and dutiful deportment towards himſelf, the offices of juſtice and charity towards others, Mic. vi. 8. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* And 1 John iv. 21. *This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo.* And yet it is too viſible that many, who make a great profeſſion of piety towards God, are very defective in moral duties; very unpeaceable, and turbulent in their ſpirits, very peeviſh and paſſionate, very conceited and cenſorious, as if their profeſſion of godlineſs did exempt them from the care and practice of chriſtian virtues. But we muſt not ſo fix our eye upon heaven, as to forget that we walk upon the earth, and to neglect the ordering of our ſteps and converſation among men, leſt while we are gazing upon the ſtars, we fall into the ditch of groſs and foul immorality.

It is very poſſible, that men may be devout and zealous in religion, very nice and ſcrupulous about the worſhip and ſervice of God; and yet becauſe of their palpable defect in points of juſtice and honeſty, of meekneſs and humility, of peace and charity, may be groſs and odious hypocrites. For men muſt not think for ſome acts, either of outward or inward piety, to compound with God for the neglect of mercy and judgment, or to demand it as a right from men to be excuſed from the great duties and virtues of human converſation; or pretend to be above them, becauſe they relate chiefly to this world, and to the temporal happineſs of men; as if it were the privilege of great devotion, to give a licence to men to be peeviſh and froward, ſour and moroſe, ſupercilious and cenſorious in their behaviour towards others. Men muſt have a great care, that they be not intent upon the outward parts of religion, to the prejudice of inward and real goodneſs, and that they do not ſo uſe the means of religion, as to neglect and loſe the main end of it: that they do not place all religion in faſting and outward mortification: For though theſe things be very uſeful and neceſſary in their place, if they be diſcreetly managed, and made ſubſervient to the great ends of religion; yet it is often ſeen that men have ſo unequal a reſpect to the ſeveral parts of their duty, that faſting and corporal ſeverity, thoſe meager and lean duties of piety, in compariſon, do like *Pharaoh*'s *lean kine, devour and eat up* almoſt all *the goodly and well favoured*, the great and ſubſtantial duties of the chriſtian life; and therefore men muſt take great heed, leſt whilſt they are ſo intent upon mortifying themſelves, they do not mortify virtue and good-nature, humility and meekneſs and charity, things highly valuable in themſelves, and amiable in the eyes of men, and in the ſight of God of great price.

For the neglect of the moral duties of the ſecond table is not only a mighty ſcandal to religion, but of pernicious conſequence many other ways. A fierce and ill-governed, an ignorant and injudicious zeal for the honour of God, and ſomething or other belonging neceſſarily, as they think, to his true worſhip and ſervice, hath made many men do many unreaſonable, immoral and impious things, of which hiſtory will furniſh us with innumerable inſtances, in the practice of the *Jeſuits*, and other zealots of the church of *Rome*; and there are not wanting too many examples of this kind amongſt ourſelves: For men that are not ſober, and conſiderate in their religion, but give themſelves up to the conduct of blind prejudice, and furious zeal, do eaſily perſuade themſelves that any thing is lawful, which they ſtrongly fanſy to tend to the honour of God, and to the advancement of the cauſe of religion. Hence ſome have proceeded to that height of abſurdity, in their zeal for their religion and church, as to think it not only lawful but highly commendable and meritorious, to equivocate upon oaths, and break faith with hereticks, and to deſtroy all thoſe that differ from them; as if it were piety in ſome caſes to lye for the truth, and to kill men for God's ſake.

So that if we would approve the integrity of our hearts to God, and evidence to ourſelves the ſincerity of our obedience, we ought impartially to regard all the laws of God, and every part of our duty: and if we do not, our heart is not upright with God. 'Tis obſervable that ſincerity in ſcripture is often called by the name of integrity, and perfection, becauſe it is integrated and made up of all the parts of our duty.

6. The laſt evidence I ſhall mention of the ſincerity of our religion is, if it hold out againſt perſecution and endure the fiery trial. This is the utmoſt proof of our integrity, when we are called to bear the croſs, to be willing then to expoſe all our worldly intereſt, and even life itſelf, for the cauſe of God and religion. This is a trial which God doth not always call his faithful ſervants to; but they are always to be prepared for it, in the purpoſe and reſolution of their minds. This our Saviour makes the great mark of a true diſciple, *if any man* (ſaith he) *will be my diſciple, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me.* This is a certain ſign, that men have *received the word into good ground*, and are well *rooted* in their religion, when they are not ſhaken by theſe fierce aſſaults; *for many* (as our Saviour tells us) *hear the word, and with joy receive it; but having not root in themſelves, they endure but for a while, and when perſecution and tribulation ariſeth, becauſe of the word, preſently they are offended*; nay ſome, when they ſee perſecution coming at a diſtance, wheel off and bethink themſelves of making their retreat in time, and of *agreeing with their adverſary, whilſt he is yet in the way.*

So that conſtancy to our religion in caſe of danger, and ſuffering for it, is the beſt proof of our ſincerity. This is *the fiery trial*, as the ſcripture calls it, which will try what materials we are made of, and whether we love God and his truth in ſincerity.

And thus I have conſidered ſincerity as it reſpects God, and imports true piety and religion towards him; and I proceed to the *ſecond* conſideration,

II. Of ſincerity as it regards men; and ſo it ſignifies a ſimplicity of mind and manners in our converſation, and carriage one towards another; ſingleneſs of heart, diſcovering itſelf in a conſtant plainneſs and honeſt openneſs of behaviour, free from all inſidious devices, and little tricks, and fetches of craft and cunning; from all falſe appearances and deceitful diſguiſes of ourſelves in word or action; or yet more plainly, it is to ſpeak as we think, and do what we pretend and profeſs, to perform and make good what we promiſe, and, in a word, really to be, what we would ſeem and appear to be.

Not that we are obliged to tell every man all our mind; but we are never to declare any thing contrary to it: We may be ſilent, and conceal as much of ourſelves, as prudence, or any other good reaſon requires; but we muſt not put on a diſguiſe, and make a falſe appearance and empty ſhew of what we are not, either by word or action. Contrary to this virtue is (I fear) moſt of that compliment which is current in converſation, and which for the moſt part is nothing but words, to fill up the gaps, and ſupply the emptineſs of diſcourſe; and a pretence to that kindneſs and eſteem for perſons, which either in truth we have not, or not to that degree which our expreſſions ſeem to import; which if done with deſign, is that which we call flattery, a very odious ſort of inſincerity, and ſo much the worſe, becauſe it abuſes men into a vain and fooliſh opinion of themſelves, and an ill grounded confidence of the kindneſs and good-will of others towards them; and ſo much the more dangerous, becauſe it hath a party within us, which is ready to let it in; it plays upon our ſelf-love, which greedily catcheth at any thing that tends to magnify and advance us; for God knows, we are all too apt to think and make the beſt of our bad ſelves, ſo that very few tempers have wiſdom and firmneſs enough to be proof againſt flattery; it requires great conſideration and a reſolute modeſty and humility, to reſiſt the inſinuations of this ſerpent; yea, a little rudeneſs and moroſeneſs of nature, a prudent diſtruſt and infidelity in mankind, to make a man in good earneſt to reject and deſpiſe it.

Now beſides, that all hypocriſy and inſincerity is mean in itſelf, having falſhood at the bottom; it is alſo often made uſe of, to the prejudice of others, in their rights and intereſts. For not only diſſimulation is contrary to ſincerity, becauſe it conſiſts in a vain ſhew of what we are not, in a falſe muſter of our virtues and good qualities, in a deceitful repreſentation and undue character of our lives: but there are likewiſe other qualities and actions more inconſiſtent with integrity, which are of a more injurious and miſchievous conſequence to our nature, as falſhood and fraud, and perfidiouſneſs, and infinite little crafts and arts of deceit, which men practiſe upon one another in their ordinary converſation and intercourſe. The former is great vanity: but this is groſs iniquity.

And yet theſe qualities dexterouſly managed, ſo as not to lie too plain and open to diſcovery, are looked upon by many, as ſigns of great depth and ſhrewdneſs, admirable inſtruments of buſineſs, and neceſſary means for the compaſſing our own ends and deſigns; and though in thoſe that have ſuffered by them, and felt the miſchief of them, they are always accounted diſhoneſt, yet among the generality of lookers on, they paſs for great policy; as if the very ſkill of governing and managing human affairs, did conſiſt in thoſe little tricks and devices: but he that looks more narrowly into them, and will but have the patience to obſerve the end of them, will find them to be great follies, and that it is only for want of true wiſdom and underſtanding, that men *turn aſide to tricks*, and *make diſſimulation and lies their refuge*. It is *Solomon*'s obſervation, that *he that walketh uprightly, walketh ſurely; but the folly of fools is deceit. The folly of fools*, that is, the moſt egregious piece of folly that any man can be guilty of, is to play the knave: The vulgar tranſlation renders this clauſe a little otherwiſe, but yet towards the ſame ſenſe, *ſed ſtultus divertit ad dolos, but the fool turns aſide to tricks*; to make uſe of theſe, is a ſign the man wants underſtanding to ſee the plain and direct way to his end. I will not deny but theſe little arts may ſerve a preſent turn, and perhaps ſucceſsfully enough; but true wiſdom goes deep, and reacheth a great way farther, looking to the end of things, and regarding the future as well as the preſent, and, by judging upon the whole matter and ſum of affairs, doth clearly diſcern that craft and cunning are only uſeful for the preſent occaſion; whereas integrity is of a laſting uſe, and will be ſerviceable to us upon all occaſions, and in the whole courſe of our lives; and that diſſimulation and deceit, tho' they may do ſome preſent execution in buſineſs, yet they recoil upon a man terribly afterwards, ſo as to make him ſtagger, and by degrees to weaken, and at laſt to deſtroy his reputation, which is a much more uſeful and ſubſtantial and laſting inſtrument of proſperity and ſucceſs in human affairs, than any tricks and devices whatſoever. Thus have I conſidered this great virtue of ſincerity, both as it regards God, and the mutual converſation and intercourſe of men one with another.

And now having explain'd the nature of ſincerity to God and man, by declaring the properties of it, and in what inſtances we ought chiefly to practiſe it, and what things are contrary to it; that which remains, is to perſuade men to endeavour after this excellent quality, and to practiſe it in all the words and actions of their lives.

Let us then, in the firſt place, be ſincere in our religion, and ſerve God in truth and uprightneſs of heart, out of conſcience of our duty and obligations to him, and not with ſiniſter reſpects to our private intereſt or paſſion, to the publick approbation or cenſure of men. Let us never make uſe of religion to ſerve any baſe and unworthy ends, cloking our deſigns of covetouſneſs, or ambition, or revenge, with pretences of conſcience and zeal for God; and let us endeavour after the reality of religion, always remembring that a ſincere piety doth not conſiſt in ſhew, but ſubſtance, not in appearance, but in effect; that the ſpirit of true religion is ſtill and calm, charitable and peaceable, making as little ſhew and ſtir as is poſſible; that a truly and ſincerely good man does not affect vain oſtentation, and an unſeaſonable diſcovery of his good qualities, but endeavours rather really to be, than to ſeem religious, and, of the two, rather ſeeks to conceal his piety, than to ſet it out with pomp; gives his alms privately; prays to God in ſecret, and makes no appearance of religion, but in ſuch fruits and effects as cannot be hid; in the quiet and ſilent virtues of humility, and meekneſs, and patience, of peace and charity; in governing his paſſions, and taking heed not to offend with his tongue, by ſlander and calumny, by envious detraction or raſh cenſure, or by any word or action that may be to the hurt and prejudice of his neighbour: But, on the contrary, it is a very ill ſign, if a man affect to make a great noiſe and buſtle about religion; if he blow a trumpet before his good works, and by extraordinary ſhews of devotion ſummon the eyes of men to behold him, and do as it were, call aloud to them to take notice of his piety, *and to come and ſee his zeal for the Lord of Hoſts*. It is not impoſſible but ſuch a man, with all his vanity and oſtentation, may have ſome real goodneſs in him; but he is *as the hypo-*

crites are, and does as like one as is poſſible; and by the mighty ſhew that he makes, to wiſe and conſiderate men, greatly brings in queſtion the ſincerity of his religion.

And with the ſincerity of our piety towards God, let us join the ſimplicity and integrity of manners in our converſation with men. Let us ſtrictly charge ourſelves to uſe truth and plainneſs in all our words and doings; let our tongue be ever the true interpreter of our mind, and our expreſſions the lively image of our thoughts and affections, and our outward actions exactly agreeable to our inward purpoſes and intentions.

Amongſt too many other inſtances of the great corruption and degeneracy of the age wherein we live, the great and general want of ſincerity in converſation is none of the leaſt. The world is grown ſo full of diſſimulation and compliment, that mens words are hardly any ſignification of their thoughts; and if any man meaſure his words by his heart, and ſpeak as he thinks, and do not expreſs more kindneſs to every man, than men uſually have for any man, he can hardly eſcape the cenſure of rudeneſs and want of breeding. The old *Engliſh* plainneſs and ſincerity, that generous integrity of nature and honeſty of diſpoſition, which always argues true greatneſs of mind, and is uſually accompanied with undaunted courage and reſolution, is in a great meaſure loſt among us; there hath been a long endeavour to transform us into foreign manners and faſhions, and to bring us to a ſervile imitation of none of the beſt of our neighbours, in ſome of the worſt of their qualities. The dialect of converſation is now-a-days ſo ſwell'd with vanity and compliment, and ſo ſurfeited (as I may ſay) with expreſſions of kindneſs and reſpect, that if a man that lived an age or two ago, ſhould return into the world again, he would really want a dictionary to help him to underſtand his own language, and to know the true intrinſick value of the phraſe in faſhion, and would hardly, at firſt believe at what a low rate the higheſt ſtrains and expreſſions of kindneſs imaginable do commonly paſs in current payment; and when he ſhould come to underſtand it, it would be a great while before he could bring himſelf, with a good countenance and a good conſcience, to converſe with men upon equal terms, and in their own way.

And, in truth, it is hard to ſay, whether it ſhould more provoke our contempt or our pity, to hear what ſolemn expreſſions of reſpect and kindneſs will paſs between men, almoſt upon no occaſion; how great honour and eſteem they will declare for one whom perhaps they never heard of or ſaw before, and how intirely they are all on the ſudden devoted to his ſervice and intereſt, for no reaſon; how infinitely and eternally obliged to him, for no benefit; and how extremely they will be concern'd for him, yea and afflicted too, for no cauſe. I know it is ſaid, in juſtification of this hollow kind of converſation, that there is no harm, no real deceit in compliment, but the matter is well enough, ſo long as we underſtand one another; *Et verba valent ut nummi, words are like money,* and when the current value of them is generally underſtood, no man is cheated by them. This is ſomething, if ſuch words were any thing; but being brought into the account, they are mere cyphers. However, it is ſtill a juſt matter of complaint, that ſincerity and plainneſs are out of faſhion, and that our language is running into a lye, that men have almoſt quite perverted the uſe of ſpeech, and made words to ſignify nothing; that the greateſt part of the converſation of mankind, and of their intercourſe with one another, is little elſe but driving a trade of diſſimulation; inſomuch that it would make a man heartily ſick and weary of the world, to ſee the little ſincerity that is in uſe and practice among men, and tempt him to break out into that melancholy complaint and wiſh of the prophet, Jer. ix. *O that I had in the wilderneſs a lodging-place of way-faring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them: for they are all adulterers, and an aſſembly of treacherous men; and they bend their tongue like their bow for lies, but have no courage for the truth upon earth. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and truſt ye not in any brother; for every brother will utterly ſupplant, and every neighbour will walk with ſlanders. Thine habitation is in the midſt of deceit; one ſpeaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in his heart he lieth in wait. Shall not I viſit for theſe things, ſaith the Lord? and ſhall not my ſoul be avenged of ſuch a nation as this?*

Such were the manners of the people of *Iſrael* at that time, which were both the forerunner and the cauſe of thoſe terrible calamities which befell them afterwards; and this character agrees but too well to the preſent age, which is ſo wretchedly void of truth and ſincerity; for which reaſon there is the greater need to recommend this virtue to us, which ſeems to be fled from us, that *truth and righteouſneſs may return, and glory may dwell in our land, and God may ſhew his mercy upon us, and grant* *us his ſalvation, and righteouſneſs and peace may kiſs each other.* To this end give me leave to offer theſe following conſiderations.

Firſt, That ſincerity is the higheſt commendation, and the very beſt character, that can be given of any man; it is the ſolid foundation of all virtue, the heart and ſoul of all piety and goodneſs; it is in ſcripture called *perfection,* and frequently joined with it; and throughout the bible, there is the greateſt ſtreſs and weight laid upon it; it is ſpoken of as the ſum and comprehenſion of all religion. *Only fear the Lord, and ſerve him in ſincerity and truth,* ſays *Joſhua* to the people of *Iſrael, Joſh.* xxiv. 14. God takes great pleaſure in it; ſo *David* aſſures us, 1 *Chron.* xxix, 17. *I know, my God, that thou trieſt the heart, and haſt pleaſure in uprightneſs:* And again, *Thou loveſt truth in the inward parts.*

To this diſpoſition of mind the promiſes of divine favour and bleſſing are particularly made, *Pſal.* xv. 1, 2. *Lord, who ſhall dwell in thy tabernacle? who ſhall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteouſneſs, and ſpeaketh the truth from his heart.* Pſal. xxxii. 2. *Bleſſed is the man, unto whom the Lord imputeth no ſin, and in whoſe ſpirit there is no guile.*

And 'tis obſervable that this character of our Saviour here given of *Nathanael,* is the only full and perfect commendation that we read was ever given by him of any particular perſon. He commends ſome particular acts of piety and virtue in others, as St. *Peter*'s confeſſion of him, the faith of the *Centurion,* and of the woman that was healed by touching the hem of his garment, the charity of the woman that caſt her two mites into the treaſury, and the bounty of that other devout woman who poured upon him a box of precious ointment: But here he gives the particular character of a good man, when he ſays of *Nathanael,* that he was an *Iſraelite indeed, in whom was no guile.* And the Apoſtle mentions this quality, as the chief ingredient into the character of the beſt man that ever was, our bleſſed Saviour *who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*

Secondly, The rarity of this virtue is a farther commendation of it. A ſincerely pious and good man, without any guile or diſguiſe, is not a ſight to be ſeen every day. Our Saviour in the text ſpeaks of it, as a thing very extraordinary and of ſpecial remark and obſervation, and breaks out into ſome kind of wonder upon the occaſion, as if to ſee a man of perfect integrity and ſimplicity were an occurrence very rare and unuſual, and ſuch as calls for our more ſpecial attention and regard, *Behold* (ſaith he) *an Iſraelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*

Thirdly, The want of ſincerity will quite ſpoil the virtue and acceptance of all our piety and obedience, and certainly deprive us of the reward of it. All that we do in the ſervice of God, all our external obedience to his laws, if not animated by ſincerity, is like a ſacrifice without a heart, which is an abomination to the Lord.

Fourthly, Hypocriſy and inſincerity is a very vain and fooliſh thing; it is deſigned to cheat others, but is in truth a deceiving of ourſelves. No man would flatter or diſſemble, did he believe he were ſeen and diſcovered; an open knave is a great fool, who deſtroys at once both his deſign and reputation; and this is the caſe of every hypocrite; all the diſagreement which is between his tongue and his thoughts, his actions and his heart, is open to that eye, from which nothing can be hid; *for the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ſeeth all his goings; there is no darkneſs nor ſhadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themſelves.*

Fifthly, Truth and reality have all the advantages of appearance, and many more. If the ſhew of any thing be good for any thing, I am ſure ſincerity is better; for why does any man diſſemble, or ſeem to be that which he is not, but becauſe he thinks it good to have ſuch a quality as he pretends to? for to counterfeit and diſſemble, is to put on the appearance of ſome real excellency. Now the beſt way in the world for a man to ſeem to be any thing, is really to be what he would ſeem to be. Beſides, that it is many times as troubleſome to make good the pretence of a good quality, as to have it; and if a man have it not, it is ten to one, but he is diſcovered to want it, and then all his pains and labour to ſeem to have it is loſt. There is ſomething unnatural in painting, which a skiful eye will eaſily diſcern from native beauty and complexion.

It is hard to perſonate and act a part long; for where truth is not at the bottom, nature will always be endeavouring to return, and will peep out and betray herſelf one time or other. Therefore if any man think it convenient to ſeem good, let him be ſo indeed, and then his goodneſs will appear to every body's ſatisfaction; for truth is convincing,

vincing, and carries its own light and evidence along with it, and will not only commend us to every man's conſcience, but which is much more, to God, who ſearcheth and ſeeth our hearts; ſo that upon all accounts ſincerity is true wiſdom. Particularly as to the affairs of this world, integrity hath many advantages over all the fine and artificial ways of diſſimulation and deceit; it is much the plainer and eaſier, much the ſafer and more ſecure way of dealing in the world; it hath leſs of trouble and difficulty, of intanglement and perplexity, of danger and hazard in it; it is the ſhorteſt and neareſt way to our end, carrying us thither in a ſtraight line, and will hold out and laſt longeſt. The arts of deceit and cunning do continually grow weaker and leſs effectual and ſerviceable to them that uſe them; whereas integrity gains ſtrength by uſe, and the more and longer any man practiſeth it, the greater ſervice it does him, by confirming his reputation, and encouraging thoſe with whom he hath to do, to repoſe the greater truſt and confidence in him, which is an unſpeakable advantage in the buſineſs and affairs of life.

But a diſſembler muſt always be upon his guard, and watch himſelf carefully, that he do not contradict his own pretence; for he acts an unnatural part, and therefore muſt put a continual force and reſtraint upon himſelf. Truth always lies uppermoſt, and if a man do not carefully attend, he will be apt to bolt it out: whereas he that acts ſincerely hath the eaſieſt task in the world; becauſe he follows nature, and ſo is put to no trouble and care about his words and actions; he needs not invent any pretences beforehand, nor make excuſes afterwards, for any thing he hath ſaid or done.

But inſincerity is very troubleſome to manage; a man hath ſo many things to attend to, ſo many ends to bring together, as make his life a very perplex'd and intricate thing. *Oportet mendacem eſſe memorem, A liar had need of a good memory*, leſt he contradict at one time what he ſaid at another: but truth is always conſiſtent with itſelf, and needs nothing to help it out; it is always near at hand, and ſits upon our lips, and is ready to drop out before we are aware; whereas a lye is troubleſome, and ſets a man's invention upon the rack, and one trick needs a great many more to make it good. It is like building upon a falſe foundation, which continually ſtands in need of props to ſhore it up, and proves at laſt more chargeable, than to have raiſed a ſubſtantial building at firſt upon a true and ſolid foundation; for ſincerity is firm and ſubſtantial; and there is nothing hollow and unſound in it, and becauſe it is plain and open, fears no diſcovery, of which the crafty man is always in danger, and when he thinks he walks in the dark, all his pretences are ſo tranſparent, that he that runs may read them: he is the laſt man that finds himſelf to be found out, and whilſt he takes it for granted that he makes fools of others, he renders himſelf ridiculous.

Add to all this, that ſincerity is the moſt compendious wiſdom, and an excellent inſtrument for the ſpeedy diſpatch of buſineſs; it creates confidence in thoſe we have to deal with, ſaves the labour of many enquiries, and brings things to an iſſue in few words: It is like travelling in a plain beaten road, which commonly brings a man ſooner to his journey's end, than by-ways, in which men often loſe themſelves. In a word, whatſoever convenience may be thought to be in falſhood and diſſimulation, it is ſoon over; but the inconvenience of it is perpetual, becauſe it brings a man under an everlaſting jealouſy and ſuſpicion, ſo that he is not believed when he ſpeaks truth, nor truſted, when perhaps he means honeſtly: When a Man hath once forfeited the reputation of his integrity, he is ſet faſt, and nothing will then ſerve his turn, neither truth nor falſhood.

And I have often thought, that God hath in great wiſdom hid from men of falſe and diſhoneſt minds the wonderful advantages of truth and integrity to the proſperity even of our worldly affairs; theſe men are ſo blinded by their covetouſneſs and ambition, that they cannot look beyond a preſent advantage; nor forbear to ſeize upon it, tho' by ways never ſo indirect; they cannot ſee ſo far, as to the remote conſequences of a ſteddy integrity, and the vaſt benefit and advantages which it will bring a man at laſt. Were but this ſort of men wiſe and clear-ſighted enough to diſcern this, they would be honeſt, out of very knavery, not out of any love to honeſty or virtue, but with a crafty deſign to promote and advance more effectually their own intereſt; and therefore the juſtice of the divine providence hath hid this trueſt point of wiſdom from their eyes, that bad men might not be upon equal terms with the juſt and upright, and ſerve their own wicked deſigns by honeſt and lawful means.

Indeed, if a man were only to deal in the world for a day, and ſhould never have occaſion to converſe more with mankind, never more need their good opinion, or good word, it were then no great matter (ſpeaking as to the concernments of this world) if a man ſpent his reputation all at once, and ventured it at one throw: But if he be to continue in the world, and would have the advantage of converſation whilſt he is in it, let him make uſe of truth and ſincerity in all his words and actions, for nothing but this will laſt and hold out to the end, all other arts will fail, but truth and integrity will carry a man through, and bear him out to the laſt.

'Tis the obſervation of *Solomon*, Prov. xii. 19. *The lip of truth is eſtabliſhed for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.* And the wiſer any man is, the more clearly will he diſcern, how ſerviceable ſincerity is to all the great ends and purpoſes of human life; and that man hath made a good progreſs, and profited much in the ſchool of wiſdom, who valueth truth and ſincerity according to their worth. Every man will readily grant them to be great virtues, and arguments of a generous mind, but that there is ſo much of true wiſdom in them, and that they really ſerve to profit our intereſt in this world, ſeems a great parodox to the generality of men; and yet I doubt not but it is undoubtedly true, and generally found to be ſo, in the experience of mankind.

Laſtly, Conſider that it is not worth our while to diſſemble, conſidering the ſhortneſs and eſpecially the uncertainty of our lives. To what purpoſe ſhould we be ſo cunning, when our abode in this world is ſo ſhort and uncertain? Why ſhould any man by diſſembling his judgment, or acting contrary to it, incur at once the diſpleaſure of God, and the diſcontent of his own mind? eſpecially if we conſider, that all our diſſimulation ſhall one day be made manifeſt and publiſhed on the open theatre of the world, before God, angels and men, to our everlaſting ſhame and confuſion, all diſguiſe and vizards ſhall then be pluckt off, and every man will appear in his true colours. For *then the ſecrets of men ſhall be judged*, and *God will bring every work into judgment, and every ſecret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil. Nothing is now covered, which ſhall not then be revealed, nor hid which ſhall not then be known.*

Let us then be now what we would be glad to be found in that day, when all pretences ſhall be examined, and the cloſeſt hypocriſy of men ſhall be laid open and daſh'd out of countenance; when the ſecrets of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed, and all the hidden works of darkneſs ſhall be revealed, and all our thoughts, words, and actions ſhall be brought to a ſtrict and ſevere trial, and be cenſured, by that impartial and infallible judgment of God, which is according to truth; *In the day when God ſhall judge the ſecrets of men, by Jeſus Chriſt.*

To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be glory now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON II.

The Excellency of *Abraham*'s Faith and Obedience.

Preached at Whitehall 1686 before the Princeſs Anne.

HEB. xi. 17, 18, 19.

By Faith Abraham, *when he was tried, offered up* Iſaac: *and he that had received the promiſes offered up his only begotten ſon: of whom it was ſaid that in* Iſaac *ſhall thy ſeed be called: accounting that God was able to raiſe him up, even from the dead; from whence alſo he received him in a figure.*

THE deſign of this Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* is to recommend to them the chriſtian religion, to which they were but newly converted, and to encourage them to conſtancy in the profeſſion of it, notwithſtanding the ſufferings which attended it. He ſets before them in this chapter ſeveral examples in the old Teſtament of thoſe, who, tho' they were under a much more imperfect diſpenſation, yet by a ſtedfaſt belief in God and his promiſes, had performed ſuch wonderful acts of obedience and ſelf-denial.

He begins with the patriarchs before the flood; but inſiſts chiefly upon the examples of two eminent perſons of their own nation, as neareſt to them, and moſt likely to prevail upon them, the examples of *Abraham* and *Moſes*, the one the father of their nation, the other their great lawgiver, and both of them the greateſt patterns of faith, and obedience, and ſelf-denial, that the hiſtory of all former ages, from the beginning of the world, had afforded.

I ſhall at this time, by God's aſſiſtance, treat of the firſt of theſe, the example of *Abraham*, the conſtancy of whoſe faith, and the chearfulneſs of whoſe obedience, even in the difficulteſt caſes, is ſo remarkable above all the other examples mentioned in this Chapter. For, *at the command of God he left his kindred and his country, not knowing whither he ſhould go*; by which eminent act of obedience he declared himſelf to be wholly at God's diſpoſal, and ready to follow him: But this was no trial in compariſon of that here in my text, when God commanded him *to offer up his only ſon*: But ſuch was the immutable ſtedfaſtneſs of his faith, and the perfect ſubmiſſion of his obedience, that it does not appear that he made the leaſt check at it; but out of perfect reverence and obedience to the authority of the divine command, he went about it as readily and chearfully, as if God had bid him do ſome ſmall thing: *By Faith* Abraham, *when he was tried, offered up* Iſaac.

For the explication of which words, it will be requiſite to conſider *Two* things.

Firſt, The trial or temptation in general.

Secondly, The excellency of *Abraham*'s faith and obedience upon this trial.

Firſt, The trial or temptation in general: It is ſaid, that *Abraham when he was tried*, the word is πειραζόμενος, *being tempted*: that is, God intending to make trial of his faith and obedience; and ſo it is expreſt, *Gen.* xxii. 1. where it is ſaid, that *God did tempt* Abraham, *and ſaid unto him, take now thy ſon, thine only ſon.*

Now there are two difficulties concerning this matter. It ſeems contrary to Scripture, that God ſhould tempt any man; and contrary to reaſon; becauſe God, who knows what every man will do, needed not to make trial of any man's faith and obedience.

Firſt, It ſeems contraay to Scripture, which ſays, *God tempts no man*: And 'tis moſt true, that God tempts no man, with a deſign to draw him into ſin; but this doth not hinder, but he may try their faith and obedience with great difficulties, to make them the more illuſtrious. Thus God tempted *Abraham*; and he permitted *Job*, and even our bleſſed Saviour himſelf to be thus tempted.

Secondly, It ſeems contrary to reaſon, that God, who knows what any man will do in any circumſtances, ſhould go to make trial of it. But God does not try men for his own information; but to give an illuſtrious proof and example to others of faith and obedience: And tho' after this trial of *Abraham*, God ſays to him, *Now I know that thou loveſt me, becauſe thou haſt not withheld thy ſon, thine only ſon from me*; yet we are to underſtand this as ſpoken after the manner of men; as God elſewhere ſpeaks to *Abraham* concerning *Sodom*; *I will go down now to ſee whether they have done altogether according to the cry which is come up unto me; and if not, I will know.*

I proceed to the *Second* thing I propoſed, the excellency of *Abraham's* faith and obedience upon this trial: By *Faith* Abraham, *when he was tried, offered up* Iſaac. God accepts of it, as if he had done it; becauſe he had done it in part, and was ready to have performed the reſt, if God had not countermanded him.

And this act of faith and obedience in *Abraham* will appear the more illuſtrious, if we conſider theſe *Three* Things.

I. The firmneſs and ſtedfaſtneſs of his faith, notwithſtanding the objections againſt it.

II. The conſtancy of his reſolution, notwithſtanding the difficulty of the thing.

III. The reaſonableneſs of his faith, in that he gave ſatisfaction to himſelf in ſo hard and perplex'd a caſe.

I. The firmneſs and ſtedfaſtneſs of his faith will appear, if we conſider what objections there were in the caſe, enough to ſhake a very ſtrong faith. There were three great objections againſt this command, and ſuch as might in reaſon make a wiſe and good man doubtful whether this command were from God.

The horrid nature of the thing commanded.

The grievous ſcandal that might ſeem almoſt unavoidably to follow upon it.

And the horrible conſequence of it, which ſeemed to make the former promiſe of God to *Abraham* void.

Firſt, The horrid nature of the thing commanded, which was for a father to kill his own child. This muſt needs appear very barbarous and unnatural, and look liker a ſacrifice to an idol, than to the true God.

It ſeemed to be againſt the law of nature, and directly contrary to that kindneſs and affection which God himſelf had planted in the hearts of parents towards their children.

And there is no affection more natural and ſtrong than this; for there are many perſons that would redeem the lives of their children with the hazard of their own. Now that God hath planted ſuch an affection in nature, is an argument that it is good, and therefore it could not but ſeem ſtrange, that he ſhould command any thing contrary to it: And in this caſe, there were two circumſtances that increaſed the horror of the fact; that his ſon was innocent; and that he was to ſlay him with his own hands.

1. That his ſon was innocent. It would grieve the heart of any father, to give up his ſon to death, tho' he were never ſo undutiful and diſobedient.

So paſſionately was *David* affected with the death of his ſon *Abſalom*, as to wiſh he had died for him, tho' he died in the very act of rebellion, and tho' the ſaving of his life had been inconſiſtent with the peace of his government.

How deep then muſt it ſink into the heart of a father, to give up his innocent ſon to death? and ſuch a ſon was *Iſaac*, for any thing that appeared to the contrary. God himſelf gave him this teſtimony, that he was *the ſon whom his father loved*, and there is no intimation of any thing to the contrary. Now this could not but appear ſtrange to a good man, that God ſhould command an innocent perſon to be put to death. But,

2. That a father ſhould be commanded, not only to give up his ſon to death, but to ſlay him with his own hands; not only to be a ſpectator, but to be the actor in this tragedy. What father would not ſhrink, and ſtart back at ſuch a command? What good man, eſpecially in ſuch a caſe, and where nature was ſo hard preſt, would not have been apt to have looked upon ſuch a revelation as this, rather as the ſuggeſtion and illuſion of an evil ſpirit, than a command of God? And yet *Abraham*'s faith was not ſtaggered, ſo as to call this revelation of God in queſtion.

Secondly, The grievous ſcandal that might ſeem almoſt unavoidably to follow upon it, was another great objection againſt it. The report of ſuch an action would in all appearance blemiſh the reputation, even of ſo good a man, amongſt all ſober and conſiderate perſons, who could hardly forbear to cenſure him, as a wicked and unnatural man.

And this was a hard caſe, for a man to be put to ſacrifice at once two of the deareſt things in the world, his reputation and his ſon: Nor could he have eaſily defended himſelf from this imputation, by alledging an expreſs revelation and command of God for it; for who would give credit to it?

A revelation to another man is nothing to me, unleſs I be aſſured, that he had ſuch a revelation, which I cannot be, but either by another immediate revelation, or by ſome miracle to confirm it.

The act had an appearance of ſo much horror, that it was not eaſily credible that God ſhould command it; and if every man's confident pretence to revelation be admitted, the worſt actions may plead this in their excuſe. So that this pretence would have been ſo far from excuſing his fault, that it muſt rather have been eſteemed an high aggravation of it, by adding the boldeſt impiety to the moſt barbarous inhumanity.

But *Abraham* was not ſtumbled at this, nor at the advantage which the enemies of his religion would make of ſuch an occaſion, who would be ready to ſay, *here is your excellent good man, and likely to be a friend of God, who was ſo cruel an enemy to his own ſon!* All this, 'tis probable, he might conſider: But it did not move him, being reſolved to obey God, and to leave it to his wiſdom to provide againſt all the inconveniencies that might follow upon it.

Thirdly, The ſtrongeſt objection of all was the horrible conſequence of the thing, which ſeemed to claſh with former revelations, and to make void the promiſe which God had before made to *Abraham*, *that in his ſeed all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed*, which promiſe was expreſly limited to *Iſaac* and his poſterity, who had then no ſon.

And of this difficulty the Apoſtle takes expreſs notice in the text, that *he that had received the promiſes*, (that is, was perſuaded of the truth and faithfulneſs of them) *offered up his only begotten ſon, of whom it was ſaid, that in* Iſaac *ſhall thy ſeed be called.*

And this objection is really ſo ſtrong, that if *Abraham* could not have given himſelf ſatisfaction about it, he might juſtly have queſtioned the truth of the revelation. For no man can poſſibly entertain two contradictory revelations as from God, but he muſt of neceſſity queſtion one or both of them: But ſo ſtrong was *Abraham*'s faith, as not to be ſhaken by the ſeeming contradiction of theſe two revelations.

II. We will conſider the conſtancy of his reſolution to obey God, notwithſtanding the harſhneſs and difficulty of the thing. Tho' *Abraham* were firmly perſuaded, that this command to kill his ſon was really from God; yet it is no eaſy matter for a man to bring himſelf to obey God in ſo difficult a caſe, and out of mere reverence to the divine authority, to diveſt himſelf of his nature, and to thwart the ſtrongeſt inclinations of it; a man would be very apt to confer with fleſh and blood in ſuch a caſe. Let but any man that knows what it is to be a father, lay his hand upon his heart, and conſider his own bowels; and he will be aſtoniſhed at *Abraham*'s obedience as well as his faith.

To take *his ſon, his only ſon, his ſon whom he loved*, and in whom he placed all his hopes of a happy poſterity, and with his own hands to deſtroy him and all his hopes together! It muſt be a ſtrong faith, that will engage a man to obedience in ſo difficult an inſtance.

There is one circumſtance more eſpecially, which renders *Abraham*'s obedience very remarkable; the deliberateneſs of the action. It had not been ſo much, if ſo ſoon as he had received this command from God, he had upon a ſudden impulſe and tranſport of zeal done this.

But that his obedience might be the more glorious, and have all the circumſtances of advantage given to it, God would have it done deliberately, and upon full conſideration; and therefore he bad him go to the mountain three days journey from the place where he was, and there to offer up his ſon.

It is in acts of virtue and obedience, as in acts of ſin and vice; the more deliberate the ſin is, and the more calm and ſedate temper the man is in when he commits it, the greater is the fault; whereas, what is done by ſurpriſe, in the heat of temptation, or tranſport of paſſion, hath ſome excuſe from the ſuddenneſs and indeliberateneſs of it.

So it is in acts of virtue and obedience, eſpecially if they be attended with conſiderable difficulty, the more deliberately they are done, the more virtuous they are, and the greater praiſe is due to them.

Now, that *Abraham*'s obedience might want nothing to heighten it, God ſeems on purpoſe to have put ſo long a ſpace betwixt the command and the performance of it; he gives him time to cool upon it, to weigh the command, and to look on every ſide of this difficult duty; he gives ſcope for his reaſon to argue, and debate the caſe, and opportunity for natural affection to play its part, and for fleſh and blood to raiſe all its batteries againſt the reſolution which he had taken up.

And now we may eaſily imagine, what conflict this good man had within himſelf during thoſe three days that he was travelling to the mountain in *Moriah*; and how his heart was ready to be rent in pieces, betwixt his duty to God, and his affection to his child; ſo that every ſtep of this unwelcome and weariſome journey, he did, as it were, lay violent hands upon himſelf.

He was to offer up his ſon but once; but he ſacrificed himſelf and his own will every moment for three days together; and when he came thither, and all things were ready, the altar, the wood, and the fire, and the knife, it muſt needs be a ſtabbing queſtion, and wound him to the heart, which his innocent ſon ſo innocently ask'd him, *where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?*

It muſt be a ſtrong faith indeed, and a mighty reſolution, that could make him to hold out three days againſt the violent aſſaults of his own nature, and the charming preſence of his ſon, enough to melt his heart, as often as he caſt his eyes upon him: And yet nothing of all this made him to ſtagger in his duty, but *being ſtrong in faith, he gave glory to God*, by one of the moſt miraculous acts of obedience that ever was exacted from any of the ſons of men.

III. In the *third* and laſt place, I come to conſider the reaſonableneſs of his faith, in that he was able to give ſatisfaction to himſelf in ſo intricate and perplex'd a caſe. The conſtancy of *Abraham*'s faith, was not an obſtinate and ſtubborn perſuaſion, but the reſult of the wiſeſt reaſoning, and ſobereſt conſideration.

So the text ſays, that *he counted*, the word is λογισάμενος, *he reaſoned with himſelf, that God was able to raiſe him up from the dead*; ſo that he debated the matter with himſelf, and gave himſelf ſatisfaction, concerning the objections and difficulties in the caſe; and being fully ſatisfied that it was a divine command, he reſolved to obey it.

As for the *objections* I have mentioned:

1. The horrid appearance of the thing, that a father ſhould ſlay his innocent ſon. Why ſhould *Abraham* ſcruple the doing this, at the command of God, who being the author of life, hath power over it, and may reſume what he hath given, and take away the life of any of his creatures when he will, and make whom he pleaſeth inſtruments in the execution of his command?

It was indeed a hard caſe, conſidering natural affection; and therefore God did not permit it to be executed.

But the queſtion of God's right over the lives of men; and of his authority to command any man to be the inſtrument of his pleaſure in ſuch a caſe, admits of no diſpute.

And tho' God hath planted ſtrong affections in parents towards their children; yet he hath written no law in any man's heart to the prejudice of his own ſovereign right. This is a caſe always excepted, and this takes away the objection of injuſtice.

2. As to the ſcandal of it, *that* could be no great objection in thoſe times, when the abſolute power of parents over their children was in its full force, and they might put them to death without being accountable for it. So that then it was no ſuch ſtartling matter to hear of a father putting his child to death. Nay, in much later times we find, that in the moſt ancient laws of the *Romans*, (I mean thoſe of the XII *tables*) children are abſolutely put in the power of their parents, to whom is given, *jus vitæ & necis, a power of life and death* over them; and likewiſe to ſell them for ſlaves.

And tho' amongſt the *Jews* this paternal power was limited by the law of *Moſes*; and the judgment of life and death was taken out of the father's hands, except in caſe of contumacy and rebellion; (and even in that caſe the proceſs was to be before the elders of the city) yet it is certain, that in elder times the paternal power was more abſolute and unaccountable, which takes off much from the horror and ſcandal of the thing, as it appears now to us who have no ſuch power.

And therefore we do not find in the hiſtory, that this objection did much ſtick with *Abraham*; it being then no unuſual thing for a father to put his child to death upon a juſt account.

And the command of God, who hath abſolute dominion over the lives of his creatures, is certainly a juſt reaſon; and no man can reaſonably ſcruple the doing of that, upon the command of God, which he might have done by his own authority, without being accountable for the action, to any but God only.

3. As to the objection from the horrible conſequence of the thing commanded, that the ſlaying of *Iſaac* ſeemed to overthrow *the promiſe which God had made before to* Abraham, *That in* Iſaac *his ſeed ſhould be called:* This ſeems to him to be the great difficulty, and here he makes uſe of reaſon, to reconcile the ſeeming contradiction of this command of God, to his former promiſe. So the text tells us, that *he offered up his only begotten ſon, of whom it was ſaid, that in* Iſaac *ſhall thy ſeed be called*; *reaſoning that God was able to raiſe him up from the dead.* So that, tho' *Iſaac* were put to death, yet he ſaw, how the promiſe of God might ſtill be made good by his being raiſed from the dead, and living afterwards to have a numerous poſterity.

There had then indeed been no inſtance, or example of any ſuch thing in the world, as the reſurrection of one from the dead, which makes *Abraham*'s faith the more wonderful: But he confirmed himſelf in this belief, by an example as near the caſe as might be; *he reaſoned, that God was able to raiſe him from the dead, from whence alſo he had received him in a figure.*

This, I know, is by interpreters generally underſtood of *Iſaac*'s being delivered from the jaws of death, when he was laid upon the altar, and ready to be ſlain. But the text ſeems not to ſpeak of what happened after; but of ſomething that had paſſed before, by which *Abraham* confirmed himſelf in this perſuaſion, that if he were ſlain, God would raiſe him up again.

And ſo the words ὅθεν ἐκομίσατο ought to be rendered, in the paſt time, *from whence alſo he had received him in a figure.* So that this expreſſion plainly refers to the miraculous birth of *Iſaac*, when his parents were paſt the age of having children; which was little leſs than a reſurrection from the dead.

And ſo the Scripture ſpeaks of it, *Rom.* iv. 17. Abraham *believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things which are not, as if they were; and not being weak in faith, he conſidered not his own body which was dead*; (and a little before the text, ſpeaking of the miraculous birth of *Iſaac*) *and therefore ſprang there of one, and him as good as dead, as many as the ſtars of heaven.*

From whence (as the Apoſtle tells us) *Abraham* reaſoned thus; that God who gave him *Iſaac* at firſt in ſo miraculous a manner, was able by another miracle to reſtore him to life again, after he was dead, and to make him the father of many nations. *He reaſoned that God was able to raiſe him up from the dead, from whence alſo he had received him in a figure.*

Thus you ſee the reaſonableneſs of *Abraham*'s faith; he pitched upon the main difficulty in the caſe, and he anſwered it, as well as was poſſible: And in his reaſoning about this matter he gives the utmoſt weight to every thing that might tend to vindicate the truth and faithfulneſs of God's promiſe, and to make the revelations of God conſiſtent with one another; and this, tho' he had a great intereſt and a very tender concernment of his own, to have biaſſed him.

For he might have argued with great appearance and probability the other way: But as every pious and good man ſhould do, he reaſoned on God's ſide, and favoured that part. Rather than diſobey a command of God, or believe, that his promiſe ſhould be fruſtrate, he will believe any thing that is credible and poſſible, how improbable ſoever. Thus far faith will go; but no farther. From the believing of plain contradictions and impoſſibilities, it always deſires to be excuſed.

Thus much for explication of the words; which I hope hath not been altogether unprofitable, becauſe it tends to clear a point which hath ſomething of difficulty and obſcurity in it, and to vindicate the holy Scripture, and the divine revelation therein contained, from one of the moſt ſpecious objections of infidelity.

But I had a farther deſign in this Text; and that is to make ſome *obſervations* and *inferences* from it, that may be of uſe to us. As,

Firſt, That human nature is capable of clear and full ſatisfaction, concerning a divine revelation. For if *Abraham* had not been fully and paſt all doubt aſſured that this was a command from God, he would certainly have ſpared his ſon. And nothing is more reaſonable, than to believe, that thoſe, to whom God is pleaſed to make immediate revelations of his will, are ſome way or other aſſured that they are divine; otherwiſe they would be in vain, and to no purpoſe.

But how men are aſſured concerning divine revelations made to them, is not ſo eaſy to make out to others; only theſe two things we are ſure of.

1. That God can work in the mind of man a firm perſuaſion of the truth of what he reveals, and that ſuch a revelation is from him. This no man can doubt of, that conſiders the great power and influence, which God, who made us, and perfectly knows our frame, muſt needs have upon our minds and underſtandings.

2. That God never offers any thing to any man's belief, that plainly contradicts the natural and eſſential notions of his mind; becauſe this would be for God to deſtroy his own workmanſhip, and to impoſe that upon the underſtanding of man, which whilſt it remains what it is, it cannot poſſibly admit.

For inſtance, we cannot imagine, that God ſhould reveal to any man any thing that plainly contradicts the eſſential perfections of the divine nature; for ſuch a revelation can no more be ſuppoſed to be from God, than a revelation from God, that there is no God; which is a downright contradiction.

Now to apply this to the revelation which God made to *Abraham*, concerning the ſacrificing of his ſon: This was made to him by an audible voice, and he was fully ſatisfied by the evidence which it carried along with it, that it was from God.

For this was not the firſt of many revelations that had been made to him, ſo that he knew the manner of them, and had found by manifold experience, that he was not deceived, and upon this experience was grown to a great confidence in the truth and goodneſs of God. And it is very probable, the firſt time God appeared to *Abraham*, becauſe it was a new thing, that to make way for the credit of future revelations, God did ſhew himſelf to him in ſo glorious a manner, as was abundantly to his conviction.

And this St. *Stephen* does ſeem to intimate, *Acts* vii. 2. *The God of glory appeared to our father* Abraham *when he was in* Meſopotamia. Now by this glorious appearance of God to him at firſt, he was ſo prepared for the entertainment of after revelations, that he was not ſtaggered even at this, concerning the ſacrificing of his ſon, being both by the manner of it, and the aſſurance that accompanied it, fully ſatisfied, that it was from God.

Secondly, I obſerve from hence the great and neceſſary uſe of reaſon in matters of faith. For we ſee here, that *Abraham*'s reaſon was a mighty ſtrengthening and help to his faith. Here were two revelations made to *Abraham*, which ſeemed to claſh with one another; and if *Abraham*'s reaſon could not have reconciled the repugnancy of them, he could not poſſibly have believed them both to be from God; becauſe this natural notion or principle, that *God cannot contradict himſelf*, every man does firſt, and more firmly believe, than any revelation whatſoever.

Now *Abraham*'s reaſon relieved him in this ſtrait. So the Text expreſly tells us, *he reaſoned with himſelf, that God was able to raiſe him from the dead.*

And this being admitted, the command of God, concerning the ſlaying of *Iſaac*, was very well conſiſtent with his former promiſe, That *in Iſaac his Seed ſhould be called.*

I know, there hath a very rude clamour been raiſed by ſome perſons, (but of more zeal, I think, than judgment) againſt the uſe of reaſon in matters of faith: But how very unreaſonable this is, will appear to any one that will but have patience to conſider theſe following particulars.

1. The nature of divine revelation; that it doth not endow men with new faculties, but propoundeth new objects to the faculties, which they had before. Reaſon is the faculty whereby revelation is to be diſcerned; for when God reveals any thing to us, he reveals it to our underſtanding, and by that we are to judge of it. Therefore St. *John* cautions us, 1 *John* iv. 1. *Not to believe every ſpirit; but to try the ſpirits whether they are of God; becauſe many falſe prophets are gone out into the world*; that is, there are many that falſly pretend to inſpiration: But how can theſe pretenders be tried and diſcerned from thoſe that are truly inſpired, but by uſing our reaſon, in comparing the evidence for the one and the other?

2. This will farther appear, if we conſider the nature of faith. Faith (as we are now ſpeaking of it) is an aſſent of the mind to ſomething as revealed by God: Now all aſſent muſt be grounded upon evidence; that is, no man can believe any thing, unleſs he have or thinks he hath ſome reaſon to do ſo. For to be confident of a thing without reaſon, is not faith; but a preſumptuous perſuaſion and obſtinacy of mind.

3. This will yet be more evident, if we conſider the method, that muſt of neceſſity be uſed to convince any man of the truth of Religion. Suppoſe, we had to deal with one that is a ſtranger and enemy to Chriſtianity, what means are proper to be uſed to gain him over to it? The moſt natural method ſurely were this, to acquaint him with the holy Scriptures, which are the rule of our faith and practice. He would aſk us, *Why we believe that book?* The proper anſwer would be, *Becauſe it is the word of God*; this he could not but acknowledge to be a very good reaſon, if it were true: But then he would aſk, *Why we believed it to be the word of God, rather than* Mahomet's Alchoran, *which pretends no leſs to be of divine inſpiration?*

If any man now ſhould anſwer, that *he could give no reaſon, why he believed it to be the word of God, only he believed it to be ſo, and ſo every man elſe ought to do without enquiring after any farther reaſon, becauſe reaſon is to be laid aſide in matters of faith*; would not the man preſently reply, *that he had juſt as much reaſon as this comes to, to believe the* Alchoran, *or any thing elſe*; that is, none at all?

But certainly the better way would be to ſatisfy this man's reaſon by proper arguments that the Scriptures are a divine revelation, and that no other book in the world, can with equal reaſon pretend to be ſo: And if this be a good way, then we do and muſt call in the aſſiſtance of reaſon for the proof of our religion.

4. Let it be conſidered farther, that the higheſt commendations that are given in Scripture to any one's faith, are given upon account of the reaſonableneſs of it. *Abraham*'s faith is famous, and made a pattern to all generations, becauſe he reaſoned himſelf into it, notwithſtanding the objections to the contrary, and he did not blindly break thro' theſe objections, and wink hard at them; but he looked them in the face, and gave himſelf reaſonable ſatisfaction concerning them.

The *Centurion*'s faith is commended by our Saviour, *Matth.* viii. 9. becauſe when his ſervant was ſick, he did not deſire him to come to his houſe, but to *ſpeak the word only, and his ſervant ſhould be healed:* For he reaſoned thus, *I am a man under authority, having ſoldiers under me; and I ſay to this man, go, and he goeth; and to another,* *come, and he cometh*; *and to my ſervant, do this, and he doth it*. Now, if he, that was himſelf under authority, could thus command thoſe that were under him; much more could he that had a divine power and commiſſion, do what he pleaſed by his word. And our Saviour is ſo far from reprehending him for reaſoning himſelf into this belief, that he admires his faith ſo much the more for the reaſonableneſs of it, *ver.* 10. *When Jeſus heard this, he marvelled, and ſaid to them that followed him, Verily, I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no not in Iſrael.*

In like manner our Saviour commends the woman of *Canaan*'s faith, becauſe ſhe inforced it ſo reaſonably. *Matthew* xv. 22. She ſued to him to help her daughter; *but he anſwered her not a word*; and when his diſciples could not prevail with him to mind her, yet ſtill ſhe preſſed him, *ſaying, Lord help me*; and when he repulſed her with this ſevere anſwer, *It is not meet to take the childrens meat and caſt it to dogs*; ſhe made this quick and modeſt reply, *Truth, Lord*; *yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their maſters table.* She acknowledgeth her own unworthineſs; but yet believes his goodneſs to be ſuch, that he will not utterly reject thoſe who humbly ſeek to him; upon which he gives her this teſtimony, *O woman, great is thy faith!*

The Apoſtles were divinely inſpired; and yet the *Bereans* are commended, becauſe they inquired and ſatisfied themſelves in the reaſons of their belief, before they aſſented to the doctrine which was delivered to them, even by teachers that certainly were infallible.

5. None are reproved in Scripture for their unbelief, but where ſufficient reaſon and evidence was offered to them. The *Iſraelites* were generally blamed for their infidelity; but then it was after ſuch mighty wonders had been wrought for their conviction.

The *Jews*, in our Saviour's time are not condemned ſimply for their unbelief; but for not believing when there was ſuch clear evidence offered to them. So our Saviour himſelf ſays, *If I had not done amongſt them the works which no other man did, they had not had ſin.*

Thomas indeed is blamed for the perverſeneſs of his unbelief, becauſe he would believe nothing but what he himſelf ſaw.

Laſtly, to ſhew this yet more plainly, let us conſider the great inconvenience and abſurdity of declining the uſe of reaſon in matters of Religion. There can be no greater prejudice to Religion, than to decline this trial.

To ſay, we have no reaſon for our religion, is to ſay, it is unreaſonable. Indeed it is reaſon enough for any article of our faith, that God hath revealed it; becauſe this is one of the ſtrongeſt and moſt cogent reaſons for the belief of any thing. But when we ſay, God hath revealed any thing, we muſt be ready to prove it, or elſe we ſay nothing. If we turn off reaſon here, we level the beſt religion in the world with the wildeſt and moſt abſurd enthuſiaſms.

And it does not alter the caſe much, to give reaſon ill names, to call it *blind*, and *carnal reaſon*. Our beſt reaſon is but very ſhort and imperfect: But ſince it is no better, we muſt make uſe of it as it is, and make the beſt of it.

Before I paſs from this argument, I cannot but obſerve, that both the extremes of thoſe who differ from our church, are generally great declaimers againſt the uſe of reaſon in matters of faith. If they find *their* account in it, 'tis well; for *our parts* we apprehend no manner of inconvenience, in having reaſon on our ſide; nor need we to deſire a better evidence, that any man is in the wrong, than to hear him declare againſt reaſon, and thereby to acknowledge that reaſon is againſt him. Men may vilify reaſon as much as they pleaſe; and tho' *being reviled* ſhe *reviles not again*, yet in a more ſtill and gentle way, ſhe commonly hath her full revenge upon all thoſe that rail at her.

I have often wondered that people can with patience endure to hear their teachers and guides talk againſt reaſon; and not only ſo, but they pay them the greater ſubmiſſion and veneration for it. One would think this but an odd way to gain authority over the minds of men; But ſome skilful and deſigning men have found by experience, that it is a very good way to recommend them to the ignorant; as nurſes uſe to endear themſelves to children, by perpetual noiſe and nonſenſe.

Thirdly, I obſerve, that God obligeth no man to believe plain and evident contradictions, as matters of faith. *Abraham* could not reaſonably have believed this ſecond revelation to have been from God, if he had not found ſome way to reconcile it with the firſt. For tho' a man were never ſo much diſpoſed to ſubmit his reaſon to divine revelation; yet it is not poſſible for any man to believe God againſt God himſelf.

Some men ſeem to think, that they oblige God mightily, by believing plain contradictions. But the matter is quite otherwiſe. He that made man a *reaſonable* creature, cannot take it kindly from any man to debaſe his workmanſhip, by making himſelf *unreaſonable.* And therefore, as no ſervice, or obedience; ſo no faith is acceptable unto God, but what is reaſonable: If it be not ſo, it may be confidence or preſumption; but it is not faith. For he that can believe plain contradictions, may believe any thing how abſurd ſoever; becauſe nothing can be more abſurd, than the belief of a plain contradiction; and he that can believe any thing, believes nothing upon good grounds, becauſe to him truth and falſhood are all one.

Fourthly, I obſerve, that the great cauſe of the defect of mens obedience is the weakneſs of their faith. Did we believe the commands of God in the Goſpel, and his promiſes and threatnings, as firmly as *Abraham* believed God in this caſe; what ſhould we not be ready to do, or ſuffer, in obedience to him?

If our faith were but as ſtrong and vigorous as his was, the effects of it would be as great and conſpicuous. Were we verily perſuaded, that all the precepts of our Religion are the expreſs laws of God, and that all the promiſes and threatnings of the Goſpel will one day be verified and made good; *what manner of perſons ſhould we be in all holy converſation and godlineſs?* How would the lively thoughts of another world, raiſe us above the vanities of this preſent life; and ſet us out of the reach of the moſt powerful temptations that this world can aſſault us withal; and make us to do all things with regard to eternity, and to that ſolemn and dreadful account which we muſt one day make to God the judge of all?

It is nothing but the want of a firm and ſteddy belief of theſe things that makes our devotion ſo dead and heartleſs, and our reſolutions of doing better ſo weak and inconſiſtent. This it is that makes us ſo eaſy a prey to every temptation; and the things of this world to look ſo much bigger than they are, the enjoyments of it more tempting, and the evils of it more terrible than in truth they are; and in all diſputes betwixt our conſcience and our intereſt, this makes us hold the balance ſo unequally, and to put our foot upon the lighter ſcale, that it may ſeem to weigh down the other.

In a word, in proportion to the ſtrength or weakneſs of our faith, our obedience to God will be more or leſs conſtant, uniform and perfect; becauſe faith is the great ſource and ſpring of all the virtues of a good life.

Fifthly, We have great reaſon to ſubmit to the ordinary ſtrokes of God's providence upon ourſelves, or near relations, or any thing that is dear to us. Moſt of theſe are eaſy, compar'd with *Abraham*'s caſe; it requires a prodigious ſtrength of faith to perform ſo miraculous an act of obedience.

Sixthly, and laſtly, We are utterly inexcuſable, if we diſobey the eaſy precepts of the Goſpel. *The yoke of Chriſt is eaſy, and his burden light,* in compariſon of God's former diſpenſations. This was *a grievous commandment* which God gave to *Abraham, to ſacrifice his only ſon:* It was *a hard ſaying indeed*; and *which of us could have been able to bear it?*

But if God think fit to call us to the more difficult duties of ſelf-denial, and ſuffering for his truth and righteouſneſs ſake, we muſt, after the example of faithful *Abraham,* not think much to deny, or part with any thing for him, no not life itſelf. But even this, which is the hardeſt part of Religion, is eaſier than what God put upon *Abraham.*

For it doth not offer near the violence to nature, to lay down our life in a good cauſe, as it would do to put a child to death with our own hands. Beſides the conſideration of the extraordinary comfort and ſupport, and the glorious rewards that are expreſly promiſed to our obedience and ſelf-denial in ſuch a caſe; encouragement enough to make a very difficult duty eaſy.

And whilſt I am perſuading you and myſelf to reſolution and conſtancy in our holy Religion, notwithſtanding all hazards and hardſhips that may attend it, I have a juſt ſenſe of the frailty of human nature, and of human reſolution: But withal, a moſt firm perſuaſion of the goodneſs of God, that *he will not ſuffer* thoſe who ſincerely love him and his truth, *to be tempted above what they are able.*

I will add but one conſideration more, to ſhew the difference betwixt *Abraham*'s caſe and ours. God commanded him to do the hardeſt thing in the world, to ſacrifice his only ſon; but he hath given us an eaſy commandment; and that he might effectually oblige us to our duty, he hath done that for us which he required *Abraham* to do for him; *he hath not ſpared his own ſon, his only ſon; but hath given him up to death for us all: And hereby we know, that he loveth us, that he hath given his ſon for us.*

What

What God required of *Abraham*, he did not intend ſhould be executed; but one great deſign of it was to be a type and figure of that immenſe love and kindneſs which he intended to all mankind in the ſacrifice of his ſon, as a propitiation for the ſins of the whole world.

And as the moſt clear and expreſs promiſe of the Meſſias was made to *Abraham*; ſo the moſt expreſs and lively type of the Meſſias that we meet with in all the Old Teſtament, was *Abraham* offering up his ſon. And as St. *Hierom* tells us (from an ancient and conſtant tradition of the *Jews*) the mountain in *Moriah*, where *Abraham* was commanded to ſacrifice *Iſaac*, was mount *Calvary*, where our Lord alſo was crucified and offered up, *that by this one ſacrifice of himſelf once offered, he might perfect for ever them that are ſanctified, and obtain eternal redemption for us.*

Now to him that ſitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb that was ſlain; to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the firſt begotten from the dead; to the Prince of the kings of the earth; to him that loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood; to him be glory, and honour, thankſgiving and power, now and for ever, Amen.

Preached at White-hall 1687 *before the Princeſs* Anne.

SERMON III.

Moſes's Choice of afflicted Piety, rather than a Kingdom.

HEB. xi. 24, 25.

By Faith Moſes *when he was come to years, refuſed to be called the ſon of* Pharaoh's *daughter; chooſing rather to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon.*

THE text ſets before us a great pattern of ſelf-denial: for our better underſtanding whereof I will give a brief account of the hiſtory of *Moſes*, to which our Apoſtle in this paſſage doth refer.

When *Moſes* was born, his parents (for fear of the cruel law which *Pharoah* had made, *that all the male children of the Hebrews, ſo ſoon as they were born, ſhould be put to death)* after they had hid him three months, did at laſt expoſe him in an ark of bulruſhes upon the river *Nile*, and committed him to the providence of God, whom they deſpaired to conceal any longer by their own care.

Pharoah's daughter, coming by the river ſide, eſpied him, and had compaſſion on him; and gueſſing him to be one of the *Hebrew* children, called for an *Hebrew* nurſe, to take care of him, who, as the providence of God had ordered it, proved to be the child's own mother. As he grew up, *Pharaoh*'s daughter took care of his education in all princely qualities, and adopted him for her ſon; and *Pharaoh* (as *Joſephus* tells us) being without a ſon, deſigned him heir of his kingdom.

Moſes refuſed this great offer. But why did he refuſe it, when it ſeemed to be preſented to him by the providence of God, and was brought about in ſo ſtrange a manner; and when by this means he might probably have had it in his power to have eaſed the *Iſraelites* of their cruel bondage, and perhaps have had the opportunity of reducing that great kingdom from the worſhip of idols to the true God? Why would he refuſe a kingdom which was offered to him with ſo fair an opportunity of doing ſo much good?

That which ſeems to have prevailed with *Moſes*, was this, that he could not accept the offer without forſaking God, and renouncing his religion; for conſidering how ſtrangely the *Egyptians* were addicted to idolatry, he could never hope to be accepted for heir of that kingdom, unleſs he would violate his conſcience, either by abandoning or diſſembling his religion.

And how unlikely it was, that he ſhould prevail with them to change their religion, he might eaſily judge by the example of *Joſeph*, who, tho' he had ſo much authority and eſteem amongſt them, by having been ſo great a benefactor to their nation; yet he could never move them in the leaſt in that matter.

Now ſeeing he had no hopes of attaining, or enjoying that dignity, without ſinning grievouſly againſt God, he would not purchaſe a kingdom at ſo unconſcionable a price. And as for the deliverance of his people, he was content to truſt the providence and promiſe of God for that; and in the mean time was reſolved rather to take a part in the afflictions of God's people, *than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon.*

From the words thus explained, I ſhall take occaſion to conſider theſe *four* things.

I. *Moſes*'s ſelf-denial, in preferring and chooſing a ſtate of afflicted piety, before any ſinful enjoyments whatſoever, before the greateſt earthly happineſs and proſperity, when it was not to be attained and enjoyed upon other terms than of ſinning againſt God.

II. I ſhall conſider thoſe circumſtances of this ſelf-denial of *Moſes*, which do very much commend and ſet off the virtue of it.

III. The prudence and reaſonableneſs of this choice, in preferring a ſtate of afflicted piety and virtue, before the greateſt proſperity and pleaſure of a ſinful courſe.

IV. Suppoſing this choice to be reaſonable, I ſhall enquire how it comes to paſs, that ſo many make another choice.

I. We will conſider *Moſes* his ſelf-denial, in preferring a ſtate of afflicted piety before the greateſt earthly happineſs and proſperity, when it is not to be enjoyed upon other terms, than of ſinning againſt God. He was adopted heir of the kingdom of *Egypt*, (one of the greateſt and moſt flouriſhing Kingdoms then in the world;) but he could not hope to attain to this dignity, and to ſecure himſelf in the poſſeſſion of it, upon other terms, than of complying with that nation, in their idolatrous religion and worſhip.

Now being brought up in the belief of the true God, the God of *Iſrael*, by his mother, to whom *Pharaoh*'s daughter had committed him, he could not, without great violence to his conſcience, and the principles of his education, renounce the true God, and fall off to the idolatry of the *Egyptians:* And for this reaſon *he refuſed to be called the ſon of* Pharaoh's *daughter*, *chooſing rather to ſuffer affliction* with the worſhippers of the true God, than to have the temporary enjoyment of any thing that was not to be had without ſin; for ſo the word ought to be render'd ἢ πρόσκαιρον ἔχειν ἁμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν, *than to have the temporary enjoyment of ſin.* So here was *Moſes* his ſelf-denial, that he choſe rather to ſuffer affliction with the worſhippers of the true God, than to gain a kingdom, by the renouncing of God and religion.

II. We will conſider thoſe circumſtances of his ſelf-denial, which do very much commend and ſet off the virtue of it.

1. What it was he refuſed to be called; *the ſon of* Pharaoh'*s daughter*; that is, to be heir of one of the greateſt and moſt flouriſhing kingdoms in the world: A temptation ſo great, that the devil himſelf could not find out one much greater, when he ſet upon the ſon of God to tempt him to fall down and worſhip him.

And when we conſider for what inconſiderable things ſome men ſell their religion and their conſciences, we ſhall think it no ſmall temptation which *Moſes* here reſiſted. *Si violandum eſt jus, regnandi cauſâ violandum eſt*; *If a man would do any unjuſt thing, and violate his religion and conſcience, he would not do it for leſs than a kingdom*; and it would be a very hard bargain, even upon thoſe terms.

2. Conſider not only what he refuſed, but what he choſe in the place of it; a ſtate of great affliction and ſuffering. Had he refuſed a kingdom, and choſen the quiet condition of a ſubject of middle rank, (beneath envy and above contempt) his ſelf-denial had not been ſo great; nay, perhaps he had made a wiſe choice, in the account of the wiſeſt men, in preferring a plentiful and quiet retirement, before the cares of a crown, and the burden of publick government.

But it is very rare to find a man that would chooſe rather to be oppreſt and perſecuted, than to be a prince, and to have the ſweet power to uſe others as he pleaſed.

3. Conſider how fair a proſpect he had of enjoying this kingdom, if he could but have come up to the terms of it. He did not reject it, becauſe he deſpaired of attaining it: For he had all the right that a good title could give him, being adopted heir to it; and yet he refuſed it.

To which I may add, that his breeding was ſuch as might eaſily kindle ambitious thoughts in him. He was brought up in *Pharaoh*'s court, and was the darling and favourite of it; exceeding beautiful (as *Joſephus* tells us) and *learned in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians*; than which, no two qualities are more apt to puff up and ſwell a man with big thoughts of himſelf.

They that are bred in a low condition, never think of a kingdom; men not being apt to aſpire to things which are remote, and at a great diſtance from them.

But nothing is more rare in perſons of great and generous minds, than ſuch a ſelf-denial as this.

4. Let it be conſidered, in the laſt place, that this was a deliberate choice, not any raſh and ſudden determination made by him when he was of incompetent age to make a true judgment of things. And this the Apoſtle takes notice of in the Text, as a very memorable circumſtance, that *when he was come to years, he refuſed to be called the ſon of Pharaoh*'s *daughter*. And St. *Stephen* tells us, that he was *full forty years old* when he made this choice, *Acts* vii. 23. *When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to viſit his brethren, the children of Iſrael.* When he was of ripeſt judgment, and in the height of his proſperity and reputation, he made this choice; for it is ſaid in the verſe before, that *Moſes was learned in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in word and deed*; that is, he was in great reputation for his wiſdom and valour.

This ſeems to refer to other paſſages of his life, which are not recorded in the Scripture hiſtory, but related at large by *Joſephus*, out of hiſtorians extant in his time. For he tells, that when the *Ethiopians* had invaded *Egypt*, and almoſt over-run it, *Pharoah* was directed by the Oracle at *Memphis*, to make *Moſes* his General, who by his extraordinary conduct and courage overthrew the *Ethiopians*, and drave them out of *Egypt*.

This *Moſes* did not think fit to relate of himſelf; but St. *Stephen* ſeems to allude to it, when he ſays, that *he was mighty in word and deed:* And then it follows; *and when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to viſit his brethren, the children of Iſrael*; that is, when he was at full maturity of judgment, and in the height of his proſperity and reputation, he quitted the court of *Egypt* and went to viſit his afflicted brethren, and choſe rather to take part with them in their ſufferings, than to accept thoſe great offers that were made to him.

There is likewiſe another paſſage in *Joſephus* concerning *Moſes*, which ſeems to be a forerunner of the contempt which he ſhewed afterwards of the crown of *Egypt*; That when *Moſes* was about three years old, *Thermuthis*, the daughter of *Pharaoh*, brought the child to him, who took him in his arms, and put his diadem upon his head; but *Moſes* took it off, and caſt it to the ground, and trampled it under his feet. This was but a childiſh act, and they who ſaw it, would eaſily believe, that, for all his childiſh contempt of it then, if it were put upon his head in good earneſt, when he came to be a man, he would hold it on faſter, and uſe it with more reſpect.

And it is not improbable, but that the Apoſtle might have ſome regard to this, when he ſays, that *Moſes when he came to years*; intimating, that he did not only trample upon the diadem of *Pharaoh*, when he was a child; but when he was come to years, and was capable of judging better of thoſe things, *he refuſed to be called the ſon of Pharaoh*'s *daughter*.

But before I proceed any farther, I cannot but take notice of an objection, which may ſeem to reflect greatly upon the integrity of *Moſes*. Can we think him ſo very conſcientious a man, who perſuaded the people of *Iſrael*, and pretended God's direction in the caſe, to cheat the *Egyptians* of their jewels, under a fraudulent pretence of borrowing them? There is ſome difficulty in the thing, as at firſt ſight it appears: And yet I doubt not, with your favourable attention, and free from prejudice, to vindicate *Moſes* clearly in this matter.

And I ſhall not inſiſt upon that which is commonly and truly ſaid in this caſe; that God, who is the ſupreme Lord of all things, may transfer the rights of men from one to another: Becauſe the objection doth not lie againſt God's right to take away from any man what he hath given him; but againſt the fraudulent manner of doing it, which ſeems unworthy of God to command or encourage.

Now this matter, I think, is capable of another and much clearer anſwer; which, in ſhort is this, and grounded upon the hiſtory, as we find it related, *Exod.* xii. The providence of God did, it ſeems, deſign by this way to make ſome reparation to the *Iſraelites*, for the tyrannical uſage which they had received from the *Egyptians*; and that firſt (as the text expreſly tells us) *in giving them favour with the Egyptians*; who, in truth, for their own ends, and to get rid of ſuch troubleſome gueſts, were diſpoſed to lend them any thing thing they had.

Thus far all is right; here is nothing but fair borrowing and lending: And if the *Iſraelites* acquired a right to thoſe things afterwards, there was then no obligation to reſtitution.

Let us ſee then how the providence of God brought this about: Namely, by permitting the *Egyptians* afterwards, without cauſe, and after leave given them to depart, to purſue them, with a deſign to have deſtroyed them; by which hoſtility and perfidiouſneſs they plainly forfeited their right to what they had only lent before. For this hoſtile attempt, which would have warranted the *Iſraelites* to have ſpoiled them of their jewels, if they had been in the poſſeſſion of the *Egyptians*, did certainly warrant them to keep them when they had them; and by this means they became rightful poſſeſſors of what they had only by loan before, and could not have detained without fraud and injuſtice, if this hoſtility of the *Egyptians* had not given them a new title and clear right to them.

But I proceed to the *third* thing I propoſed, which was to vindicate the prudence and reaſonableneſs of this choice. And in ſpeaking to this, I ſhall abſtract from the particular caſe of *Moſes*, and ſhew in general, that it is a prudent and reaſonable thing, to prefer even an afflicted ſtate of piety and virtue, before the greateſt pleaſures and proſperity of a ſinful courſe; and this will appear, if we conſider theſe *two* things.

I. The ſufferings of good men upon account of religion, together with the reward of them.

II. The temporary enjoyment of ſin, with the miſchiefs and inconveniencies conſequent upon them.

I. The ſufferings of good men upon the account of religion, together with the reward of them. This *Moſes* had in his eye, when he made this choice; for therefore *he choſe to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin which are but for a ſeaſon*, becauſe *he had reſpect to the recompence of reward*. And tho' he had but a very imperfect diſcovery in compariſon of the future ſtate; yet it ſeems, he had ſo much aſſurance of the goodneſs of God, as firmly to believe, that he ſhould be no loſer at the laſt, by any thing that he ſuffered for God and Religion.

Indeed, if there were no life after this, and we had no expectation beyond this world, the wiſeſt thing we could do, would be to enjoy as much of the preſent contentment of this world, as we could make ourſelves maſters of. But if we be deſigned for immortality, and ſhall be unſpeakably happy, or intolerably miſerable in another world, according as we have demeaned ourſelves in this life; then certainly it is reaſonable, that we ſhould take the greateſt care of the longeſt duration, and be content to diſpenſe with ſome preſent inconveniencies for an eternal felicity; and be willing to labour and take pains for a little while, that we may be happy for ever. And this is accounted prudence in the account of the wiſeſt men, to part with a little in preſent, for a far greater future advantage.

But the diſproportion betwixt time and eternity is ſo vaſt, that, did we but firmly believe, that we ſhall live for ever, nothing in this world could reaſonably be thought too good to part withal, or too grievous to ſuffer, for the obtaining of a bleſſed immortality. And upon this belief and perſuaſion of a mighty reward, beyond all their preſent ſufferings, and that they ſhould be infinite gainers at the laſt, the primitive Chriſtians were kept from ſinking under their preſent ſufferings, and fortified againſt all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do unto them. And if we would conſider all things together, and mind the inviſible things of another world, as well as the things which are ſeen, we ſhould eaſily diſcern, that he who ſuffers for God and religion does not renounce his happineſs, but put it out to intereſt upon terms of greateſt advantage, and does wiſely conſider his own beſt and moſt laſting intereſt. This is the *Firſt*.

II. This will yet more evidently appear, if we conſider the temporary enjoyments of ſin, together with the miſchiefs and inconveniencies attending, and conſequent upon them; that as to the nature of them, they are mix'd and imperfect; as to the duration of them, they are ſhort, and but for a ſeaſon; and as to the final iſſue and conſequence of them, that they end in miſery and ſorrow.

1. As to the nature of them, all the pleaſures and enjoyments of ſin are mix'd and imperfect. A wicked man may make a ſhew of mirth and pleaſure, *but even in laughter his heart is ſorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heavineſs*. There can be no true and ſincere pleaſure in any ſinful and vicious courſe, tho' it be attended with all the pomp and ſplendor of outward happineſs and proſperity; for wherever ſin

and vice is, there muſt be guilt; and wherever guilt is, the mind will be reſtleſs and unquiet.

For there are two very troubleſome and tormenting paſſions, which are naturally conſequent upon guilt; ſhame and fear: Shame ariſing from the apprehenſion of the danger of being diſcovered; and fear, from the apprehenſion of the danger of being puniſhed: And theſe do continually haunt the ſinner, and fill him with inward horror and confuſion in his moſt ſecret retirements. And if ſin were attended with no other trouble but the guilt of it, a wiſe man would not commit it, if it were for no other reaſon, but merely for the peace and quiet of his own mind.

2. The enjoyments of ſin, as to the duration of them, are but ſhort. Upon this conſideration, *Moſes* ſet no price and value upon them, but preferred affliction and ſuffering in good company, and in a good cauſe, before *the temporary enjoyments of ſin.*

If the enjoyments of this world were perfect in their nature, and had no mixture of trouble and ſorrow in them; yet this would be a great abatement of them, that they are of ſo ſhort and uncertain a continuance. The pleaſure of moſt ſins expires with the act of them; and when that is done, the delight vaniſheth.

I cannot deny but that there are ſeveral worldly advantages to be purchaſed by ſin, which may perhaps be of a longer continuance; as riches and honours, the common purchaſe of covetouſneſs and ambition, and of that long train of inferior vices which attend upon them, and miniſter unto them: But even thoſe enjoyments, are, in their own nature, of an uncertain continuance; and much more uncertain for being purchaſed by indirect and ill means. But if the enjoyment of theſe things were ſure to be of the ſame date with our lives; yet how ſhort a duration is that, compared with eternity? Make the utmoſt allowance to theſe things, that can be, yet we can but enjoy them whilſt we are in this world. When we come into the world of ſpirits, it will ſignify nothing to us to have been rich or great in this world. When we ſhall ſtand before that higheſt tribunal, it will not avail us in the leaſt to have been princes, and great men, and judges on the earth; the pooreſt man that ever lived in this world will then be upon equal terms with the biggeſt of us all.

For all mankind ſhall then ſtand upon a level, and thoſe civil diſtinctions of rich and poor, of baſe and honourable, which ſeem now ſo conſiderable, and make ſuch a glaring difference amongſt men in this world, ſhall all then be laid aſide, and moral differences ſhall only take place. All the diſtinctions which will then be made, will be betwixt the good and the bad, the righteous and the wicked; and the difference betwixt a good and bad man, will be really much greater, than ever it ſeemed to be betwixt the higheſt and meaneſt perſons in this world.

And if this be ſo, why ſhould we value the enjoyments of ſin at ſo high a rate, which, at the beſt, are only conſiderable (and that only in the imagination of vain men) during our abode in this world; but bear no price at all in that country where we muſt live for ever: Or if they did, we cannot carry them along with us. The guilt of them, indeed, will follow us with a vengeance; the injuſtice and all the ill arts we have uſed for the getting or keeping of them, eſpecially, if at once we have *made ſhipwreck of faith and a good conſcience.*

If we have changed our Religion, or, which is much worſe, if continuing in the profeſſion of it, we have betrayed it, and the intereſt of it, for the gaining or ſecuring of any of theſe things; we ſhall find, to our ſorrow, that tho' *the enjoyments of ſin* were *but for a ſeaſon,* the guilt of it will never leave us nor forſake us; but will ſtick cloſe to us, and make us miſerable for ever. But this belongs to the

IIId Thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, namely, the final iſſue and conſequence of a ſinful courſe; which is miſery and ſorrow, many times in this world; but moſt certainly in the next.

1. In this world, the very beſt iſſue and conſequence of a ſinful courſe, that we can imagine, is repentance: And even this hath a great deal of ſenſible pain and trouble in it; for it is many times (eſpecially after great ſins, and a long continuance in them) accompanied with much regret and horror; with deep and piercing ſorrow; with diſmal and deſpairing thoughts of God's mercy; and with fearful apprehenſions of his wrath and vengeance. So that, if this were the worſt conſequence of ſin, (which indeed is the beſt) no man that conſiders and calculates things wiſely, would purchaſe the pleaſure of any ſin, at the price of ſo much anguiſh and ſorrow as a true and deep repentance will

coſt him; eſpecially, ſince a true repentance does, in many caſes, oblige men to the reſtitution of that which hath been gained by ſin, if it hath been got by the injury of another.

And this conſideration quite takes away the pleaſure and profit of an ill-gotten eſtate. Better never to have had it, than to be obliged to refund it. A wiſe man will forbear the moſt pleaſant meats, if he know before-hand that they will make him deadly ſick, and that he ſhall never be at eaſe, till he have brought them up again.

No man that believes the threatnings of God, and the judgments of another world, would ever ſin, but that he hopes to retrieve all again by repentance. But it is the greateſt folly in the world to commit any ſin upon this hope: For that is to pleaſe ones ſelf for the preſent, in hopes to have more trouble afterwards than the pleaſure comes to. But, eſpecially no man would be guilty of an act of injuſtice and oppreſſion, in hopes to repent of it afterwards; becauſe there can be no repentance for ſuch ſins without reſtitution; and 'tis perfect madneſs for a man to run the hazard of his ſoul to get an eſtate, in hopes of reſtoring it again; for ſo he muſt do that truly repents of ſuch a ſin. But,

2. In the other world, the final iſſue and conſequence of all the pleaſures of ſin unrepented of, will certainly be miſery and ſorrow. How quietly ſoever a ſinner may paſs through this world, or out of it, miſery will certainly overtake him in the next, unſpeakable and eternal miſery, ariſing from an apprehenſion of the greateſt loſs, and a ſenſe of the ſharpeſt pain; and thoſe ſadly aggravated by the remembrance of paſt pleaſure, and the deſpair of future eaſe.

From a ſad apprehenſion and melancholy reflection upon his ineſtimable loſs. In the other world, the ſinner ſhall be eternally ſeparated from God, who is the fountain of happineſs. This is the firſt part of that miſerable ſentence which ſhall be paſt upon the wicked; *depart from me.*

Sinners are not now ſenſible of the joys of heaven, and the happineſs of that ſtate, and therefore are not capable of eſtimating the greatneſs of ſuch a loſs: But this ſtupidity and inſenſibleneſs of ſinners, continues only during this preſent ſtate, which affords men variety of objects and pleaſures to divert and entertain them: But when they are once enter'd upon the other world, they will then have nothing elſe to take up their thoughts, but the ſad condition, into which by their own wilful negligence and folly they have plunged themſelves. They ſhall then *lift up their eyes,* and with the rich man in the parable, at once *ſee the happineſs of others, and feel their own miſery and torment.*

But this is not all. Beſides the apprehenſion of ſo great a loſs, they ſhall be ſenſible of the ſoreſt and ſharpeſt pains; and how grievous thoſe ſhall be we may conjecture by what the Scripture ſays of them in general; that they are the effects of a mighty diſpleaſure, of anger and omnipotence met together, far greater than can be deſcribed by any pains and ſufferings which we are acquainted withal in this world: *For who knows the power of God's anger,* and the utmoſt of what omnipotent juſtice can do to ſinners? *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

One would think, this were miſery enough, and needed no farther aggravation: But yet it hath two terrible ones; from the remembrance of paſt pleaſures, and the deſpair of any future eaſe and remedy.

The remembrance of paſt pleaſure makes preſent ſufferings more ſharp and ſenſible. For as nothing commends pleaſure more, and gives a quicker reliſh to happineſs, than precedent pain and ſuffering: (for perhaps there is not a greater pleaſure in the world, than in the ſudden eaſe which a man finds after a ſharp fit of the ſtone) ſo nothing enrageth affliction more, and ſets a keener edge upon miſery, than to paſs into great pain immediately out of a ſtate of eaſe and pleaſure. This was the ſtinging aggravation of the rich man's torment, that *in his life time he had received his good things, and had fared ſo deliciouſly every day.*

But the greateſt aggravation of all is, the deſpair of any future eaſe and remedy. The duration of this miſery is ſet forth to us in Scripture, by ſuch expreſſions as do ſignify the longeſt and moſt interminable duration. *Depart ye curſed into everlaſting fire,* Matth. xxv. and Mark ix. 43. *Where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.* And in the *Revelation* it is ſaid, that *the wicked ſhall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever,* without intermiſſion, and without end. And this ſurely is the perfection of miſery, for a man to lie under the greateſt torments, and to be in deſpair of ever finding the leaſt eaſe.

Let us now compare things together; on the one hand the ſufferings of good men, for a good conſcience, and the reward that follows them; and on the other hand, the enjoyments of ſin, and the miſchief and miſery that attend them, and will certainly overtake them in this world, or in the next: And then we ſhall eaſily diſcern which of theſe is to be preferred in a wiſe man's choice.

And indeed the choice is ſo very plain, that a man muſt be very ſtrangely forſaken of his reaſon, and blinded by ſenſe, who does not prefer that courſe of life, which will probably make him happier in this world, but moſt certainly in the next.

IV. There remains now only the *fourth* and laſt particular to be ſpoken to; *viz.* ſuppoſing this choice to be reaſonable, to enquire whence it comes to paſs, that ſo many make a quite contrary choice. How is it, that the greateſt part of mankind are ſo widely miſtaken, as to prefer the temporary enjoyments of ſin before conſcience and religion; eſpecially, if it be attended with great afflictions and ſufferings? and of this I ſhall give you as brief an acount as I can, and ſo conclude this diſcourſe.

This wrong choice generally proceeds from one or both of theſe two cauſes; from want of faith; or from want of conſideration; or of both.

1. One great reaſon why men make ſo imprudent a choice, is unbelief; either the want of faith, or the weakneſs of it. Either men do not believe the recompenſes of another life, or they are not ſo firmly perſuaded of the reality of them. If men do not at all believe theſe things, there is no foundation for religion; for *he that cometh unto God* (that is, he that thinks of being religious) *muſt believe, that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him*, as the Apoſtle reaſons in the beginning of this chapter.

But I hope, there are but few that are, or can be infidels, as to theſe great and fundamental principles of religion. But it is to be feared, that the faith of a great many is but weak and wavering; their faith is rather negative; they do not disbelieve theſe things, but they are not firmly perſuaded of them; their faith is rather an opinion, than a rooted and well-grounded perſuaſion; and therefore no wonder, if it be not ſo ſtrong and vigorous a principle of action, like the faith of *Abraham* and *Moſes*, and other Worthies mentioned in this chapter. For where faith is in its full ſtrength and vigour, it will have proportionable effects upon the reſolutions and wills of men: But where it is but weak, it is of little or no efficacy. And this is the true reaſon, why ſo many forſake religion, and cleave to this preſent world; and when it comes to the puſh, chooſe rather to ſin, than to ſuffer; and will rather quit the truth, than endure perſecution for it.

Theſe are they whom our Saviour deſcribes, *who receive the word with joy, and endure for a while; but when tribulation and perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word, preſently they are offended:* Not that they did not believe the word; but their faith had taken no deep root, and therefore it withered. The weakneſs and wavering of mens faith, makes them unſtable and inconſtant in their courſe; becauſe they are not of one mind, but divided betwixt two intereſts, that of this world, and the other; and *the double-minded man* (as St. *James* tells us) *is unſtable in all his ways.*

It is generally a true rule; ſo much wavering as we ſee in the actions and lives of men, ſo much weakneſs there is in their faith; and therefore he that would know what any man firmly believes, let him attend to his actions more than to his profeſſions.

If any man live ſo as no man that heartily believes the Chriſtian religion can live, it is not credible, that ſuch a man doth firmly believe the Chriſtian religion. He ſays, he does; but there is a greater evidence in the caſe than words; there is *Teſtimonium rei*, the man's actions are to the contrary, and they do beſt declare the inward ſenſe of the man. Did men firmly believe, that there is a God that governs the world, and that *he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge it in righteouſneſs*; and that all mankind ſhall ſhortly appear before him, and give an account of themſelves, and all their actions to him; and that thoſe who have *kept the faith and a good conſcience*, and have *lived ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world*, ſhall be unſpeakably and eternally happy; but the *fearful and unbelieving*, thoſe who out of fear or intereſt, have deſerted the faith, or lived wicked lives, *ſhall have their portion in the lake, which burns with fire and brimſtone*; I ſay, were men firmly perſuaded of theſe things, it is hardly credible, that any man ſhould make a wrong choice, and forſake the ways of truth and righteouſneſs, upon any temptation whatſoever.

Faith, even in temporal matters, is a mighty principle of action, and will make men to attempt and undergo ſtrange and difficult things. The faith of the Goſpel ought to be much more operative and powerful, becauſe the objects of hope and fear, which it preſents to us, are far greater, and more conſiderable, than any thing that this world can tempt or terrify us withal.

Would we but by faith make preſent to our minds, the inviſible things of another world, the happineſs of Heaven, and the terrors of Hell; and were we as verily perſuaded of them, as if they were in our view, how ſhould we deſpiſe all the pleaſures and terrors of this world; and with what eaſe ſhould we reſiſt and repel all thoſe temptations, which would ſeduce us from our duty, or draw us into ſin!

A firm and unſhaken belief of theſe things, would effectually remove all thoſe mountains of difficulty and diſcouragement, which men fanſy to themſelves in the ways of Religion. *To him that believeth all things are poſſible*, and moſt things would be eaſy.

2. Another reaſon of this wrong choice is want of conſideration; for this would ſtrengthen our faith, and make it more vigorous and powerful: And indeed a faith which is well rooted and eſtabliſhed doth ſuppoſe a wiſe and deep conſideration of things; and the want of this is a great cauſe of the fatal miſcarriage of men; that they do not ſit down and conſider with themſelves ſeriouſly, how much religion is their intereſt, and how much it will coſt them to be true to it, and to perſevere in it to the end.

We ſuffer ourſelves to be governed by ſenſe, and to be tranſported with preſent things; but do not conſider our future and laſting intereſt, and the whole duration of an immortal ſoul. And this is the reaſon why ſo many men are hurried away by the preſent and ſenſible delights of this world, becauſe they will not take time to think of what will be hereafter.

For it is not to be imagined, but that the man who hath ſeriouſly conſidered what ſin is, the ſhortneſs of its pleaſure, and the eternity of its puniſhment, ſhould reſolve to forſake ſin, and to live a holy and virtuous life.

To conclude this whole diſcourſe. If men did but ſeriouſly believe the great principles of Religion; the being and the providence of God; the immortality of their ſouls; the glorious rewards, and the dreadful puniſhments of another world; they could not poſſibly make ſo imprudent a choice, as we ſee a great part of mankind to do, they could not be induced to forſake God and Religion for any temporal intereſt and advantage; to renounce the favour of Heaven, and all their hopes of happineſs in another world, for any thing that this world can afford; nay not for the whole world, if it were offered to them. For as our Saviour reaſons in this very caſe, of forſaking our Religion for any temporal intereſt, or conſideration; *What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?*

Whenever any of us are tempted in this kind; let that ſolemn declaration of our Saviour and our judge be continually in our minds; *he that confeſſeth me before men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father which is in heaven: but whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him ſhall the ſon of man be aſhamed, when he ſhall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.*

And we have great cauſe to thank God, to ſee ſo many in this day of trial, and hour of temptation, to adhere with ſo much reſolution and conſtancy to their holy religion, and to prefer *the keeping of faith, and a good conſcience*, to all earthly conſiderations and advantages.

And this very thing, that ſo many hold their religion ſo faſt, and are ſo loth to part with it, gives great hopes that they intend to make good uſe of it, and to frame their lives according to the holy rules and precepts of it; which alone can give us peace, whilſt we live, and comfort when we come to die; and after death ſecure to us the poſſeſſion of a happineſs large as our wiſhes, and laſting as our ſouls.

To which, God of his infinite goodneſs bring us all, for his mercy's ſake, in Jeſus Chriſt: To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

The firſt Sermon on this text.

SERMON IV.

Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

HEB. x. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that hath promiſed.

THE main ſcope and deſign of this Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* is to perſuade the *Jews*, who were newly converted to Chriſtianity, to continue ſtedfaſt in the profeſſion of that holy and excellent religion which they had embraced; and not to be removed from it, either by the ſubtile inſinuations of their brethren the *Jews*, who pretended that they were in poſſeſſion of the true ancient Religion, and the only true church of God upon earth; or by the terror of the heathen perſecution, which was ſo hot againſt them at that time. And to this end the author of this epiſtle doth by great variety of arguments demonſtrate the excellency of the chriſtian religion above the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation; and ſhews at large, that in all thoſe reſpects upon which the *Jews* valued themſelves and their religion (as namely upon the account of their law-giver, their high-prieſts, and their ſacrifices) the chriſtian religion had every way the advantage of them.

And having made this clear, he concludes this with an earneſt exhortation to them to continue ſtedfaſt in the profeſſion of this excellent Religion, which was revealed to them by *the Son of God*, the true propitiatory ſacrifice, and the great high-prieſt of their profeſſion, and into which they had ſolemnly been initiated and admitted by baptiſm; *ver.* 19, 20, 21, 22. *Having therefore, brethren, boldneſs to enter into the holieſt, by the blood of Jeſus, by a new and living way, which he hath conſecrated for us through the veil, that is to ſay, his fleſh; and having an high-prieſt over the houſe of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full aſſurance of faith*, that is, let us ſincerely ſerve God with a firm perſuaſion of the truth and excellency of this holy religion, into the profeſſion whereof we were ſolemnly admitted by baptiſm; for that is undoubtedly the meaning of the following words; *having our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, and our bodies waſhed with pure water*; the *water* with which our bodies are waſhed in baptiſm, ſignifying our ſpiritual regeneration, and *the purging our conſciences from dead works, to ſerve the living God.* From all which he concludes, *let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*. This refers to that ſolemn *profeſſion* of faith, which was made by all chriſtians at their baptiſm, and which is contained in the ancient *creed* of the chriſtian church, called by the ancient fathers, *the rule of faith.*

Let us hold faſt, κατέχωμεν, *let us firmly retain*; the ſame with κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας, Chap. iv. 14. *Seeing then we have a great high-prieſt which is paſſed into the heavens, Jeſus the Son of God, let us take faſt hold of our profeſſion.* So here in the text, the apoſtle upon the ſame conſideration exhorts chriſtians *to retain*, or *hold faſt*, τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος, *the confeſſion*, or *profeſſion of their hope*; that is, the hope of the reſurrection of the dead, and everlaſting life, which was the concluſion of that *faith* or *creed*, whereof in baptiſm they made a ſolemn profeſſion. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith or hope, without wavering*; the word is ἀκλινῆ, *inflexible, unmoveable, ſteddy*, and *not apt to waver and be ſhaken* by every wind of contrary doctrine, nor by the blaſts and ſtorms of perſecution. *For he is faithful that hath promiſed.* If we continue faithful and ſteddy to God, he will be *faithful*, to make good all the promiſes he hath made to us.

In the words thus explained, there are *two* things which I ſhall diſtinctly conſider.

Firſt, The exhortation: *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith, without wavering:* And,

Secondly, The argument or encouragement uſed to enforce it; *He is faithful that promiſed.* I begin with the

Firſt, The exhortation to be conſtant and ſteddy in the profeſſion of the chriſtian religion; *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.* In the handling of this, and that we may the better underſtand the true meaning of this exhortation here in the text, I ſhall do theſe *two* things.

I. I ſhall ſhew negatively, wherein this conſtancy and ſteddineſs in the profeſſion of the true religion does not conſiſt. And here I ſhall remove one or two things, which are thought by ſome to be inconſiſtent with conſtancy and ſtedfaſtneſs in religion.

II. I ſhall ſhew poſitively what is implied in a conſtant and ſteddy profeſſion of the true religion.

I. I ſhall ſhew negatively, what conſtancy and ſtedfaſtneſs in the profeſſion of the true religion does not imply. And there are two things which are thought by ſome to be implied in *holding faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.*

Firſt, That men ſhould not take the liberty to examine their religion, and enquire into the grounds and reaſons of it.

Secondly, That men ſhould obſtinately refuſe to hear any reaſons that can be brought againſt the true religion, as they think, which they have once entertained.

Firſt, That men ſhould not take the liberty to examine their religion, and to enquire into the grounds and reaſons of it. This, I think, is ſo far from being forbidden in this exhortation, that, on the contrary, I doubt not to make it appear, that a free and impartial enquiry into the grounds and reaſons of our religion, and a thorough trial and examination of them, is one of the beſt means to confirm and eſtabliſh us in the profeſſion of it: I mean, that all perſons that are capable of it, ſhould do it, and that they will find great benefit and advantage by it. For I do not think, that this is a duty equally and indifferently incumbent upon all; nor indeed fit and proper for all perſons; becauſe all are not equally capable of doing it. There are two ſorts of perſons that are in a great meaſure incapable of doing it.

1. Children.
2. Such grown perſons as are of a very mean and low capacity, and improvement of underſtanding.

Children are not fit to examine, but only to learn and believe what is taught them by their parents and teachers. They are fit to have the fear of God, and the principles of the true religion, inſtilled into them; but they are by no means fit to diſcern between a true and falſe religion, and to chooſe for themſelves, and to make a change of their religion; as hath of late been allowed to them in a nation not far from us, and by publick edict declared, that children at *ſeven* years old, are fit to chooſe and to change their religion: Which is the firſt law I ever heard of, that allows children at that age to do any act for themſelves, that is of conſequence and importance to them, for the remaining part of their lives, and which they ſhall ſtand obliged to perform and make good. They are indeed baptized, according to the cuſtom and uſage of the chriſtian church, in their infancy: But they do not enter into this obligation themſelves: but their ſureties undertake for them, that when they come to age, they ſhall take this promiſe upon themſelves, and confirm and make it good. But ſurely, they can do no act for themſelves, and in their own name, at that age, which can be obligatory. They can neither make any contracts that ſhall be valid, nor incur any debt, nor oblige themſelves by any promiſe, nor chooſe themſelves a guardian, nor do any act that may bring them under an inconvenience, when they ſhall come at age. And can we think them of diſcretion ſufficient at that time, to do a thing of the greateſt moment and conſequence of all other; and which will concern them to all eternity; namely, to chooſe their religion? There is indeed one part of one religion (which we all know) which children at *ſeven* years of age are fit (I do not ſay to judge of, but) to be as fond of, and to practiſe to as good purpoſe, as thoſe of riper years; and that is to worſhip images, to tell their beads, to ſay their prayers, and to be preſent at the ſervice of God in an unknown tongue; and this they are more likely to chooſe at that age, than thoſe who are of riper and more improved underſtandings; and if they do not chooſe it at that time, it is ten to one they will not chooſe it afterwards. I ſhall ſay no more of this, but that it is a very extraordinary law, and ſuch as perhaps was never thought of before from the beginning of the world. Thus much for children.

As for grown perſons, who are of a very low and mean capacity of underſtanding, and either by reaſon of the weakneſs of their faculties, or other diſadvantages which they lie under, are in little or no probability of improving themſelves: Theſe are always to be conſidered as in the condition of children, and learners, and therefore muſt of neceſſity, in things, which are not plain and obvious to the meaneſt capacities, truſt and rely upon the judgment of others. And it is really much wiſer and ſafer for them ſo to do, than to depend upon their own judgments, and to lean to their own underſtandings; and ſuch perſons, if they be modeſt and humble, and pray earneſtly to God for his aſſiſtance and direction, and are careful to practiſe what they know, and to live up to the beſt light and knowledge which they have, ſhall not miſcarry merely for want of thoſe farther degrees of knowledge which they had no capacity nor opportunity to attain, becauſe their ignorance is unavoidable, and God will require no more of them than he hath given them, and will not call them to account for the improvement of thoſe talents, which he never committed to them. And if they be led into any dangerous error, by the negligence or ill conduct of thoſe under whoſe care and inſtruction the providence of God permitted them to be placed, God will not impute it to them as a fault; becauſe in the circumſtances in which they were they took the beſt and wiſeſt courſe that they could, to come to the knowledge of the truth, by being willing to learn what they could of thoſe whom they took to be wiſer than themſelves.

But for ſuch perſons, who by the maturity of their age, and by the natural ſtrength and clearneſs of their underſtandings, or by the due exerciſe and improvement of them, are capable of enquiring into, and underſtanding the Grounds of their religion, and diſcerning the difference betwixt truth and error (I do not mean in unneceſſary points, and matters of deepeſt learning and ſpeculation, but in matters neceſſary to ſalvation) it is certainly very reaſonable, that ſuch perſons ſhould examine their religion, and underſtand the reaſons and grounds of it.

And this muſt either be granted to be reaſonable, or elſe every man muſt continue in that religion in which he happens to be fixed by education, or for any other reaſon to pitch upon, when he comes to years, and makes his free choice. For if this be a good principle, that no man is to examine his religion, but take it as it is, and to believe it, and reſt ſatisfied with it; then every man is to remain in the religion which he firſt lights upon, whether by choice or the chance of his education. For he ought not to change but upon reaſon; and reaſon he can have none, unleſs he be allowed to examine his religion and to compare it with others, that by the compariſon he may diſcern which is beſt, and ought in reaſon to be preferred in his choice. For to him that will not, or is not permitted to ſearch into the grounds of any religion, all religions are alike; as all things are of the ſame colour to him that is always kept in the dark; or if he happens to come into the light, dares not open his eyes, and make uſe of them to diſcern the different colours of things.

But this is evidently, and at firſt ſight unreaſonable; becauſe at this rate, every man that hath once entertained an error, and a falſe religion, muſt for ever continue in it. For if he be not allowed to examine it, he can never have reaſon to change; and to make a change without reaſon, is certainly unreaſonable, and mere vanity and inconſtancy.

And yet, for ought I can ſee, this is the principle which the church of *Rome* doth, with great zeal and earneſtneſs inculcate upon their people; diſcouraging all doubts and enquiries about their religion, as temptations of the devil; and all examinations of the grounds and reaſons of their religion, as an inclination and dangerous ſtep towards hereſy. For what elſe can they mean by taking the Scriptures out of the hands of the people, and locking them up from them in an unknown tongue, by requiring them abſolutely to ſubmit their judgments, and to reſign them up to that which they are pleaſed to call the Catholick Church, and implicitly to believe as ſhe believes, tho' they know not what that is? This is, in truth, to believe as their prieſt tells them; for that is all the teaching part of the church, and all the rule of faith that the common people are acquainted with.

And it is not ſufficient to ſay in this matter, that when men are in the truth, and of the right religion, and in the boſom of the true church, they ought to reſt ſatisfied, and to examine and enquire no farther. For this is manifeſtly unreaſonable, and that upon theſe *three* accounts.

1. Becauſe this is a plain and ſhameful begging of the thing in queſtion; and that which every church, and every religion doth almoſt with equal confidence pretend to; that theirs is the only right religion, and the only true church. And theſe pretences are all alike reaſonable to him that never examined the grounds of any of them, nor hath compared them together. And therefore it is the vaineſt thing in the world for the church

of *Rome* to pretend, that all religions in the world ought to be examined, but theirs; becauſe theirs, and none elſe, is the true religion. For this which they ſay ſo confidently of it, that it is the true religion, no man can know till he hath examined it, and ſearched into the grounds of it, and hath conſidered the objections which are againſt it. So that it is fond partiality to ſay, that their religion is not to be examined by the people that profeſs it, but that all other religions ought to be examin'd, or rather, becauſe they are different from that which they preſume to be the only true Religion, ought to be condemned at all adventures, without any farther enquiry: This, I ſay, is fond partiality; becauſe every religion, and every Church, may (for ought that appears, to any man that is not permitted to examine things impartially) ſay the ſame for themſelves, and with as much reaſon; and if ſo, then either every religion ought to permit itſelf to be examined; or elſe no man ought to examine his own religion, whatever it be; and conſequently *Jews*, and *Turks*, and *Heathens*, and *Hereticks*, ought all to continue as they are, and none of them to change; becauſe they cannot reaſonably change without examining both that religion which they leave, and that which they embrace inſtead of it.

2. Admitting this pretence were true, that they are the true Church, and have the true religion; this is ſo far from being a reaſon why they ſhould not permit it to be examined, that, on the contrary, it is one of the beſt reaſons in the world why they ſhould allow it to be examined, and why they may ſafely ſuffer it to be ſo. They ſhould permit it to be tried, that men may upon good reaſon be ſatisfied that it is the true religion: And they may ſafely ſuffer it to be done; becauſe, if they be ſure that the grounds of their religion be firm and good, I am ſure they will be never the worſe for being examined and looked into. But I appeal to every man's reaſon, whether it be not an ill ſign that they are not ſo ſure that the grounds of their religion are ſolid and firm, and ſuch as will abide the trial; that they are ſo very loth to have them ſearched into and examined? This cannot but tempt a wiſe man to ſuſpect, that their church is not founded upon a rock; and that they themſelves know ſomething that is amiſs in their religion, which makes them ſo loth to have it try'd, and brought to the touch.

3. It is certain among all chriſtians, that the doctrine preached by the Apoſtles was the true faith of *Chriſt*; and yet they never forbad the chriſtians to examine whether it was ſo or not: Nay, on the contrary, they frequently exhort them to try and examine their religion, and whether that doctrine which they had delivered to them was the true faith of *Chriſt*. So St. *Paul*, 2 *Corinth.* xiii. 5. *examine yourſelves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own ſelves.* And again, 1 *Theſſ.* v. 21. *prove all things, hold faſt that which is good*; intimating to us, that in order to the holding faſt the profeſſion of our faith, it is requiſite to prove and try it. And ſo likewiſe St. *John*'s Ep. 1*ſt.* iv. 1. *Beloved, believe not every ſpirit, but try the ſpirits whether they are of God; becauſe many falſe Prophets are gone out into the world.* And he gives a very notable mark whereby we may know the ſpirit of truth, and the ſpirit of error. The ſpirit of error carries on a worldly intereſt and deſign; and the doctrines of it tend to ſecular power and greatneſs; ver. 5. *they are of the world; therefore ſpeak they of the world, and the world heareth them.* Acts xvii. 11. St. *Luke* commends it, as an argument of a more noble and generous ſpirit in the *Bereans*, that they examined the doctrine which the Apoſtles preached, *whether it were agreeable to the Scriptures*; and this without diſparagement to their infallibility: *Theſe*, ſaith he, *were more noble than thoſe of Theſſalonica, in that they received the word with all readineſs of mind, and ſearched the Scriptures daily whether thoſe things were ſo.* They were ready to receive the word; but not blindly, and with an implicit faith, but uſing due care to examine the doctrines which they were taught, and to ſee if they were agreeable to that divine revelation of the holy Scriptures which they had before received. It ſeems they were not willing to admit and ſwallow contradictions in their faith. And we deſire no more of the church of *Rome*, than that they would encourage the people to *ſearch the Scriptures daily*, and to *examine whether* their doctrines be *according to them*. We would be glad to hear the Pope and a general Council commend to the people *the ſearching of the Scriptures*, and to try their definitions of faith and decrees of worſhip by that rule, to ſee whether what they have defined, and decreed to be believed and practiſed, be agreeable to it; their worſhip of images; their ſolemn invocation of Angels, and of the bleſſed Virgin, and the ſaints departed; the Sacrament under one kind only; the publick prayers and ſervice of God in an unknown tongue; the frequent repetition of the propitiatory ſacrifice of Chriſt's body and blood in the maſs.

Had the *Bereans* been at the Council of *Trent*, and pleaded their right *to ſearch the Scriptures, whether theſe things were ſo*, I doubt, they would have been thought very troubleſome and impertinent, and would not have been praiſed by the Pope and Council for their pains, as they are by St. *Luke*.

You ſee then, upon the whole matter, that it is a very groundleſs and ſuſpicious pretence of the church of *Rome*, that becauſe they are infallibly in the right, and theirs is the true religion, therefore their people muſt not be permitted to examine it. The doctrine of the Apoſtles was undoubtedly the true faith of Chriſt; and yet they not only permitted the people to examine it, but exhorted and encouraged them ſo to do, and commended them for it: And any man, that hath the ſpirit of a man, muſt abhor to ſubmit to this ſlavery, not to be allowed to examine his religion, and to enquire freely into the grounds and reaſons of it; and would break with any church in the world upon this ſingle point; and would tell them plainly, if your religion be too good to be examined, I doubt, it is too bad to be believed.

If it be ſaid, that the allowing of this liberty is the way to make people perpetually doubting and unſettled; I do utterly deny this, and do on the contrary with good reaſon affirm, that it is apt to have the contrary effect; there being in reaſon no better way to eſtabliſh any man in the belief of any thing, than to let him ſee that there are very good grounds and reaſons for what he believes; which no man can ever ſee, that is not permitted to examine whether there be ſuch reaſons or not. So that, beſides the reaſonableneſs of the thing, it is of great benefit and advantage to us; and that upon theſe accounts.

1. To arm us againſt ſeducers. He that hath examined his religion, and tried the grounds of it, is moſt able to maintain them, and make them good againſt all aſſaults that may be made upon us, to move us from our ſtedfaſtneſs: Whereas he that hath not examined, and conſequently does not underſtand the reaſons of his religion, is liable to be *toſſed to and fro, and to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of men, and the cunning craftineſs of thoſe that lie in wait to deceive.* For when he is attempted, he will either defend his religion, or not: If he undertake the defence of it, before he hath examined the grounds of it, he makes himſelf an eaſy prey to every crafty man that will ſet upon him; he expoſeth at once himſelf to danger, and his religion to diſgrace: If he decline the defence of it, he muſt be forced to take ſanctuary in that ignorant and obſtinate principle, that becauſe he is of an infallible church, and ſure that he is in the right, therefore he never did nor will examine whether he be ſo or not. But how is he, or can he be ſure that he is in the right, if he have no other reaſon for it, but his confidence, and his being *wiſer in his own conceit, than ſeven men that can render a reaſon?* It is a ſhameful thing in a wiſe man, who is able to give a good reaſon of all other actions and parts of his life, to be able to ſay nothing for his religion, which concerns him more than all the reſt.

2. To examine and underſtand the grounds of our Religion, will be a good means (by the aſſiſtance of God's grace) to keep us conſtant to it, even under the fiery trial. When it comes to this, that a man muſt ſuffer for his religion, he had need to be well eſtabliſhed in the belief of it; which no man can ſo well be, as he that in ſome meaſure underſtands the grounds and reaſons of his belief. A man would be well aſſured of the truth and goodneſs of that for which he would lay down his life; otherwiſe *he dies as a fool dies*, he knows not for what. A man would be loth to ſet ſuch a ſeal to a blank, I mean to that which he hath no ſufficient ground and reaſon to believe to be true; which, whether he hath or not, no man that hath not examined the grounds of his religion can be well aſſured of. This St. *Peter* preſcribes, as the beſt preparative for ſuffering for righteouſneſs ſake, the firſt Epiſtle of *Peter*, iii. 14, 15. *But if ye ſuffer for righteouſneſs ſake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but ſanctify the Lord God in your hearts*; (that is, make him the great object of your dread and truſt) *and be ready always to give an anſwer to every man that asketh you a reaſon of the hope that is in you.*

Secondly, The holding faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, doth not imply, That men ſhould obſtinately refuſe to hear any reaſon againſt that religion, which they have embraced, and think to be the true religion. As men ſhould examine before they chooſe; ſo after they have choſen, they ſhould be ready to be better informed, if better reaſon can be offered. No man ought to think himſelf ſo infallible as to be privileged from hearing reaſon, and from having his doctrines and dictates try'd by that teſt.

Our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, the moſt infallible perſon that ever was in the world, and who *declared the truth which he had heard of God,* yet he offered himſelf and his doctrine to this trial. *John* viii. 46. *Which of you convinceth me of ſin?* that is, of falſhood and error? *And if I ſpeak the truth, why do ye not believe me?* He was ſure he ſpake the truth; and yet for all that, if they could convince him of error and miſtake, he was ready to hear any reaſon they could bring to that purpoſe. Though a man be never ſo ſure that he is in the true Religion, and never ſo reſolved to continue conſtant and ſtedfaſt in it; yet reaſon is always to be heard, when it is fairly offered. And as we ought always to be *ready to give an anſwer to thoſe who ask a reaſon of the hope and faith that is in us,* ſo ought we likewiſe to be ready to hear the reaſons which others do fairly offer againſt our opinion and perſuaſion in religion, and to debate the matter with them; that if we be in the right, and they in the wrong, we may rectify their miſtake, and *inſtruct them in meekneſs, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.*

We are not only to examine our Religion, before we peremptorily fix upon it; but after we are, as we think upon the beſt reaſon, eſtabliſh'd and ſettled in it. Tho' we ought not to doubt and waver in our Religion upon every ſlight and trifling objection that can be brought againſt it; yet we ought always to have an ear open to hear reaſon, and conſider any thing of weight and moment that can be offered to us about it. For it is a great diſparagement to truth, and argues a diſtruſt of the goodneſs of our cauſe and Religion, to be afraid to hear what can be ſaid againſt it; as if truth were ſo weak, that in every conflict it were in danger to be baffled and run down, and go by the worſt; and as if the reaſons that could be brought againſt it, were too hard for it, and not to be encounter'd by thoſe forces which truth has on its ſide.

We have that honeſt confidence of the goodneſs of our cauſe and Religion, that we do not fear what can be ſaid againſt it; and therefore we do not forbid our people to examine the objections of our adverſaries, and to read the beſt books they can write againſt it. But the Church of *Rome* are ſo *wiſe in their generation,* that they will not permit thoſe of their Communion to hear or read what can be ſaid againſt them: Nay, they will not permit the people the uſe of the holy Scriptures, which they, with us, acknowledge to be at leaſt an eſſential part of the rule of faith. They tell their people, that after they are once of their Church and Religion, they ought not to hear any reaſons againſt it; and though they be never ſo ſtrong, they ought not to entertain any doubt concerning it; becauſe all doubting is a temptation of the devil, and a mortal ſin. But ſurely that Church is not to he heard, which will not hear reaſon: nor that Religion to be much admired, which will not allow thoſe that have once embrac'd it, to hear it ever after debated and examined. This is a very ſuſpicious buſineſs, and argues, that either they have not truth on their ſide; or that truth is a weak, and pitiful, and ſneaking thing, and not able to make its party good againſt error.

I ſhould now have proceeded in the *ſecond* place, to ſhew *poſitively* what is implied in *holding faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*; and then to have conſidered the argument and encouragement hereto, *Becauſe he is faithful that promiſed.* But I ſhall proceed no farther at this time.

The ſecond Sermon on this Text.

SERMON V.

Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

HEB. X. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that hath promiſed.

I Have already made entrance into theſe words, which I told you do contain in them,

Firſt, An Exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering*.

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; *becauſe he is faithful that promiſed*. If we continue ſtedfaſt and faithful to God, we ſhall find him faithful to us, in making good all the promiſes which he hath made to us, whether of aid and ſupport, or of recompenſe and reward of our fidelity to him.

I have begun to handle the *firſt* part of the text, *viz.* The Apoſtle's exhortation to Chriſtians to be conſtant and ſteddy in their Religion: *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering*. The word ἀκλινῆ, which we render *without wavering*, ſignifies inflexible and unmoveable, not apt to waver and to be *ſhaken with every wind of* contrary *doctrine*, nor by the blaſts and ſtorms of perſecution. And that we might the better comprehend the full and true meaning of this exhortation, I propounded to do theſe *two* things.

I. To ſhew *negatively*, wherein this conſtancy and ſteddineſs in the profeſſion of the true Religion doth not conſiſt. And,

II. To *ſhew poſitively*, what is implied and intended here by the Apoſtle in *holding faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering*.

I. To ſhew *negatively*, wherein this conſtancy and ſteddineſs in the profeſſion of the true Religion doth not conſiſt. This I ſpake to the laſt day; and ſhewed at large, that there are *two* things which are not contained and intended in this exhortation.

1. That men ſhould not have the liberty to examine their religion, and to inquire into the grounds and reaſons of it; ſuch I mean as are capable of this examination and enquiry; which ſome, I ſhewed, are not; as children, who while they are in that ſtate, are only fit to learn and believe what is taught them by their parents and teachers: And likewiſe ſuch grown perſons, as either by the natural weakneſs of their faculties, or by ſome great diſadvantage of education, are of a very low and mean capacity and improvement of underſtanding. Theſe are to be conſider'd, as in the condition of children and learners, and therefore muſt of neceſſity truſt and rely upon the judgment of others.

2. This *holding faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering*, does not imply, that when men upon examination and enquiry are ſettled, as they think and verily believe, in the true Religion, they ſhould obſtinately refuſe to hear any reaſon that can be offered againſt them. Both theſe principles I ſhewed to be unreaſonable, and arguments of a bad cauſe and religion.

I ſhall now proceed to explain the meaning of this exhortation, to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, by ſhewing in the

Second place, what it is that is implied in the conſtant and ſteddy profeſſion of the true faith and Religion: namely, that when upon due ſearch and examination, we are fully ſatisfied, that it is the true Religion which we have embraced, or as St. *Peter* expreſſes it, *1ſt* Epiſtle, v. 12. that *this is the true grace of God, wherein we ſtand*;

that then we ſhould adhere ſtedfaſtly to it, and *hold it faſt*, and not ſuffer it to be wreſted from us, nor ourſelves to be moved from it, by any pretences, or inſinuations, or temptations whatſoever: For there is a great deal of difference between the confidence and ſtedfaſtneſs of an ignorant man, who hath never conſidered things, and enquired into the grounds of them; and the aſſurance and ſettlement of one, who hath been well inſtructed in his religion, and hath taken pains to ſearch and examine to the bottom, the grounds and reaſons of what he holds and profeſſeth to believe. The firſt is mere wilfulneſs and obſtinacy. A man hath entertained, and drank in ſuch principles of religion by education, or hath taken them up by chance; but he hath no reaſon for them: And yet, however he came by them, he is reſolved to hold them faſt, and not to part with them. The other is the reſolution and conſtancy of a wiſe man. He hath embraced his religion upon good grounds, and he ſees no reaſon to alter it: and therefore is reſolved to ſtick to it, and to *hold faſt the profeſſion of it* ſtedfaſtly to the end. And to this purpoſe there are many exhortations and cautions ſcatter'd up and down the writings of the holy Apoſtles; as that we ſhould be *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, eſtabliſhed in the truth, rooted and grounded in the faith*, and that we ſhould *hold faſt that which is good*, and not ſuffer ourſelves *to be carried to and fro with every wind of doctrine, through the ſleight of men, and the cunning craftineſs of thoſe that lie in wait to deceive*; that we ſhould *not be removed from him that hath called us unto the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel*; that we ſhould *ſtand faſt in one ſpirit and one mind, ſtriving together for the faith of the Goſpel, and be in nothing terrified by our adverſaries*; and that if occaſion be, we ſhould *contend earneſtly for the faith which was once delivered unto the ſaints*; and here in the text, that we ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*. For the explaining of this, I ſhall do *two* things:

I. Conſider *what* it is that we are to *hold faſt*; namely, *the profeſſion of our faith*; And,

II. *How* we are to *hold it faſt*, or what is implied in *holding faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*.

I. *What* it is that we are *to hold faſt*; namely, *the profeſſion of our faith*; i. e. of the *Chriſtian faith* or *religion:* For, I told you before, that this *profeſſion* or *confeſſion of our faith*, or *hope* (as the word properly ſignifies) is an alluſion to *that profeſſion of faith* which was made by all thoſe who were admitted members of the Chriſtian church by baptiſm; of which the Apoſtle makes mention immediately before the *text*, when he ſays, *let us draw near in full aſſurance of faith, having our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, and our bodies waſhed with pure water:* And then it follows, *let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering. The profeſſion of faith* which we made in our baptiſm, and which by the ancient fathers is called *the rule of faith*, and which is now contained in that which we call *the Apoſtles creed*, and which is called by St. *Paul*, Rom. vi. 17. *the form of doctrine which was delivered to them*, *i. e.* to all Chriſtians; and 2 *Tim.* i. 13. *the form of ſound words*; *Hold faſt*, ſaith he, *the form of ſound words, which thou haſt heard of me, in faith and love which is in Chriſt Jeſus*; and by St. *Jude*, *the faith which was once delivered unto the ſaints*.

So that it is the firſt and ancient faith of the Chriſtian church, delivered to them by *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles, which we are here exhorted to *hold faſt*; the neceſſary and fundamental articles of the Chriſtian faith; and by conſequence all thoſe truths which have a neceſſary connexion with thoſe articles, and are implied in them, and by plain conſequence are to be deduced from them. It is not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men; nor the partial dictates and doctrines of any church, ſince the primitive times, which are not contained in the holy Scriptures and the ancient creeds of the Chriſtian church, but have been ſince declared and impoſed upon the Chriſtian world, tho' with never ſo confident a pretence of antiquity in the doctrines, and of infallibility in the propoſers of them: Theſe are no part of *that faith* which we are either to *profeſs* or to *hold faſt*; becauſe we have no reaſon to admit the pretences, by virtue whereof thoſe doctrines or practices are impoſed; being able to make it good, and having effectually done it, that thoſe doctrines are not of primitive antiquity; and that the church which propoſeth them, hath no more claim to infallibility, than all other parts of the Chriſtian church; which ſince the Apoſtles time is none at all.

In a word; no other doctrines which are not ſufficiently revealed in Scripture, either in expreſs terms or by plain and neceſſary conſequence; nor any rites of worſhip, nor matters of practice, which are not commanded in Scripture, are to be eſteemed any part of *that faith* in religion, *the profeſſion* whereof the Apoſtle here commands all Chriſtians to *hold faſt without wavering*; much leſs any doctrines or practices which are repugnant to the word of God, and to the faith and practice of the firſt ages of Chriſtianity; of which kind I ſhall have occaſion in my following diſcourſe to inſtance in ſeveral particulars. In the mean time I ſhall only obſerve, that *that faith* and religion which we *profeſs*, and which by God's grace, we have ever *held faſt*, is *that which* hath been acknowledg'd by all Chriſtian churches in all ages, to have been *the ancient Catholick and Apoſtolick faith*, and cannot (as to any part or tittle of it) be denied to be ſo, even by the church of *Rome* herſelf.

I proceed to the

IId Thing which I propoſed to conſider; namely, *how* we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, or what is implied by the Apoſtle, in this exhortation, *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*. And I think, theſe following particulars may very well be ſuppoſed to be implied in it.

1. That we ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport their confidence.

2. And much more againſt the confidence of men, contrary to ſcripture, and reaſon, and the common ſenſe of mankind.

3. Againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Againſt all vain promiſes of being put into a ſafer condition, and groundleſs hopes of getting to heaven upon eaſier terms in another religion.

5. Againſt all the cunning arts and inſinuations of buſy and diſputing men, whoſe deſign it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain proſelytes to their own party and faction. I ſhall go over theſe with as much clearneſs and brevity as I can.

1. We ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport that confidence. All religion is either natural or inſtituted. The rule of natural religion is the common reaſon of mankind: The rule of inſtituted religion is divine revelation, or the word of God; which all Chriſtians before the council of *Trent* did agree to be contained in the holy ſcriptures. So that nothing can pretend to be religion, but what can be proved to be ſo, one or both of thoſe ways; either by ſcripture, or by reaſon, or by both. And how confident ſoever men may be of opinions deſtitute of this proof, any man that underſtands the grounds of religion, will without any more ado reject them, for want of this proof; and notwithſtanding any pretended authority or infallibility of the church that impoſed them, will have no more conſideration and regard of them, than of the confident dictates and aſſertions of any enthuſiaſt whatſoever; becauſe there is no reaſon to have regard to any man's confidence, if the arguments and reaſons which he brings, bear no proportion to it. We ſee in experience, that confidence is generally ill-grounded, and is a kind of paſſion in the underſtanding, and is commonly made uſe of, like fury and force, to ſupply for the weakneſs and want of argument. If a man can prove what he ſays by good argument, there is no need of confidence to back and ſupport it. We may at any time truſt a plain and ſubſtantial reaſon, and leave it to make its own way, and to bear out itſelf. But if the man's reaſons and arguments be not good, his confidence adds nothing of real force to them, in the opinion of wiſe men, and tends only to its own confuſion. Arguments are like powder, which will carry and do execution according to its true ſtrength; and all the reſt is but noiſe. And generally none are ſo much to be ſuſpected of error, or a deſign to deceive, as thoſe that pretend moſt confidently to inſpiration and infallibility; as we ſee in all ſorts of enthuſiaſts, who pretend to inſpiration, altho' we have nothing but their own word for it; for they work no miracles; and all pretence to inſpiration and infallibility, without miracles, whether it be in particular perſons, or in whole churches, is enthuſiaſtical: *i. e.* a pretence to inſpiration, without any proof of it.

And therefore St. *Paul* was not moved by the boaſting and confidence of the falſe Apoſtles; becauſe they gave no proof and evidence of their divine inſpiration and commiſſion, as he had done; for which he appeals to the ſenſe of men, whether he had not wrought great miracles; which the falſe Apoſtles had not done, tho' they had the confidence to give out themſelves to be Apoſtles as well as he; 2 Cor. xii. 11, 12. *I am* (ſays he) *become a fool in glorying, ye have compelled me. And truly the ſigns of an Apoſtle were wrought among you in all patience, in ſigns and wonders, and mighty deeds.* And *Rev.* ii. 2. Chriſt there commends the church of *Epheſus*, becauſe *ſhe had tried*

tried them which ſaid they were Apoſtles, but were not; and had found them liars. And as we are not to believe every one that *ſays he is an Apoſtle,* ſo neither every one that pretends to be a *ſucceſſor of the Apoſtles,* and to be endued with the ſame ſpirit of infallibility that they were: For theſe alſo, when they are *tried* whether they be *the ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles* or not, may be *found liars.* And therefore St. *John* cautions Chriſtians *not to believe every ſpirit,* (that is, every one that pretends to divine inſpiration, and the Spirit of God,) *but to try the ſpirits whether they be of God; becauſe many falſe prophets are gone out into the world,* 1 John iv. 1. And therefore the confidence of men in this kind ought not to move us, when their pretence to infallibility is deſtitute of the proper proof and evidence of it, which is a power of miracles; and when their doctrines and practices have neither the evidence of reaſon or ſcripture on their ſide.

For inſtance; *that the church of* Rome *is the mother and miſtreſs of all churches;* which is one of the new articles of pope *Pius* the IVth's creed; and yet there is not one ſyllable in ſcripture tending to this purpoſe. And in reaſon it cannot be, that any but that which was the firſt chriſtian church, ſhould be the mother of all churches; and *that* the church of *Rome* certainly was not, and the church of *Jeruſalem* undoubtedly was.

And then, *that the Biſhop of* Rome, *as ſucceſſor of St.* Peter there, *is the ſupreme and univerſal paſtor of Chriſt's church by divine appointment,* as he aſſumes to himſelf; and *that it is neceſſary to ſalvation, for every human creature to be ſubject to the Biſhop of* Rome, as is declared in their canon-law by a conſtitution of pope *Boniface* the VIIIth, which conſtitution is confirmed in the laſt *Lateran* council; of all which there is not the leaſt mention in ſcripture, nor any divine appointment to that purpoſe to be found there. And it is againſt reaſon, that all the world ſhould be obliged to trudge to *Rome* for the deciſion of cauſes and differences, which in many, and the moſt weighty matters are reſerved to the deciſion of that ſee, and can be determined no where elſe. And againſt reaſon likewiſe it is to found this univerſal ſupremacy in his being ſucceſſor of St. *Peter;* and to fix it in the Biſhop of *Rome,* rather than at *Antioch;* when it is certain, and granted by themſelves, that St. *Peter* was firſt Biſhop of *Antioch,* and out of all queſtion, that he was Biſhop of *Antioch;* but not ſo, that he was Biſhop of *Rome.*

Nor is there any thing in ſcripture for *the deliverance of ſouls out of purgatory by the prayers and maſſes of the living.* The whole thing is groundleſs, and not agreeable to the conſtant ſuppoſitions of ſcripture concerning a future ſtate. Nor is there any reaſon for it beſides that which is not fit to be given, the wealth and profit which it brings in.

The invocation and worſhip of the bleſſed virgin, and of all the ſaints departed, is deſtitute of all ſcripture-warrant or example, and confeſſed by themſelves not to have been owned or practiſed in the *three firſt* ages of the church, becauſe it looked too like the heathen idolatry; which deſerves to be well conſidered by thoſe who pretend to derive their whole religion from Chriſt and his Apoſtles by a continued and uninterrupted ſucceſſion. And this practice is likewiſe deſtitute of all colour of reaſon; unleſs we be aſſured, that they hear our prayers in all places; which we cannot be, unleſs they be preſent in all places, which they themſelves do not believe; or that God doth ſome way or other reveal and make known to them the prayers which are made to them, which we cannot poſſibly be aſſured of, but by ſome revelation of God to that purpoſe; which we no where find, nor doth the church of *Rome* pretend to it.

But I proceed to the

Second thing; namely, that we ſhould much more *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith* and religion, againſt the confidence of men, contrary to ſcripture and reaſon, and the common ſenſe of mankind. For theſe are the chief grounds of certainty, which we can have for or againſt any thing; and if theſe be clearly on our ſide, we ought not to be much moved by the confidence of men, concerning any doctrines or practices of religion, which are plainly contrary to theſe. If in points wherein we have this advantage on our ſide, we do not *hold faſt the profeſſion* of our religion, our error and folly are capable of no excuſe. And this advantage we plainly have in ſeveral points and controverſies betwixt us and the church of *Rome.*

As in *the worſhip of images;* which is as expreſly and clearly forbidden in the ſecond commandment, and that without any diſtinction, as any other thing is forbidden in the whole Bible. And that it is ſo forbidden in this commandment, and that this commandment is ſtill in force among Chriſtians, was the univerſal ſenſe of the ancient chriſtian church.

Prayers and the ſervice of God in an unknown tongue, are directly contrary to the very nature and end of religious worſhip, which ought to be a reaſonable ſervice; which it cannot be, if it be not directed by our underſtandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections: But if it be performed in an unknown tongue, our underſtanding can have no part in it; and if we do not underſtand it, it cannot move our affections. And this likewiſe is plainly contrary to ſcripture; namely, to a large diſcourſe of St. *Paul's* almoſt throughout a whole *chapter*, where he purpoſely ſets himſelf to ſhew the unprofitableneſs and groſs abſurdity of praying, or celebrating any other part of religious worſhip, in an unknown tongue. If any part of *our* religion had been half ſo clearly condemned in ſcripture, as this is, (which yet is the conſtant and general practice of the church of *Rome)* we muſt have *lain down in our ſhame, and confuſion would have covered us*; and we muſt either have rejected the authority of the Bible, or have renounced that point of our religion, whatever it had been; tho' it had been dear to us as our *right hand*, and our *right eye*, we muſt, upon ſuch plain evidence of ſcripture againſt it, have *cut it off, and plucked it out, and caſt it from us.*

The like may be ſaid of *locking up the ſcriptures from the people in an unknown tongue*; contrary to the command of the ſcriptures themſelves, and to the great end and deſign of Almighty God in the writing and publiſhing of them; and contrary to the perpetual exhortations and councils of all the ancient fathers of the chriſtian church for a great many ages, not one excepted: They are hardly more frequent, and copious, and earneſt in any argument, than in perſuading people of all ranks and conditions to the conſtant and careful reading of the holy ſcriptures: And contrary to the common reaſon and ſenſe of mankind. For what ſhould men be perſuaded to be acquainted withal, if not with that which is the great inſtrument of our ſalvation? That book which was written on purpoſe to reveal and convey to men the knowledge of God, and of his will, and their duty? What ſhould men be allowed to know, if not that which is the beſt and moſt effectual means to direct and bring them to heaven, or turn them from ſin, and to preſerve them from eternal miſery? When our Saviour would repreſent the beſt and moſt effectual means of bringing men to happineſs, and ſaving them from the eternal torments of hell, in the parable of the rich man and *Lazarus*, he brings in *Abraham*, giving the beſt advice he could to the rich man who was in hell, concerning his brethren that were upon earth, how they might prevent their *coming into that place of torment*; and he directs them to the ſcriptures, as the beſt and moſt effectual means to that purpoſe: *They have* (ſays he) *Moſes and the prophets, let them hear them.*

Now if in the church of God, among the *Jews*, the ſame courſe had been taken that is now in the church of *Rome*; the rich man might, and in all reaſon ought to have replied, *Nay, father* Abraham, *but they have not Moſes and the prophets, nor are they permitted to read them in a language that they can underſtand; and therefore this advice is of no uſe to them:* And then he might with reaſon have preſſed him, as he did, that *one might be ſent to them from the dead, to teſtify unto them.* But it appears, that *Abraham* was very poſitive and peremptory in this advice; and that he prefers the knowledge of the ſcriptures to any other way and means that could be thought of; and that if this had not its effect to perſuade men to repentance, and to preſerve them from hell, he did not know any thing elſe that was ſo likely to do it: For he concludes; *if they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.* And this is the concluſion of the parable; which plainly ſhews, what was the main ſcope and deſign of our Saviour in it; namely, to recommend to us the uſe of the holy ſcriptures, as the beſt and moſt effectual means which the wiſdom of God hath provided for the ſalvation of mankind.

And now any man would be apt to think, that the declared judgment of our Saviour in the caſe, ſhould go a great way, even with the moſt infallible church in the world. However, this we muſt ſay, that it is in truth a very hard caſe, to which the church of *Rome* hath reduced men; that it will neither allow them ſalvation out of their church, nor the beſt and moſt effectual means of ſalvation when they are in it. I might ſay much more upon this head; but this I hope, may be ſufficient.

The next inſtance ſhall be in the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*; which is contrary to the ſcriptures, which after conſecration ſo frequently call the elements *bread and wine*; and which without reaſon or neceſſity, puts an abſurd and impoſſible ſenſe upon thoſe words of our Saviour, *this is my body*; which do no more prove *tranſubſtantiation*, than thoſe words, *this cup is the New Teſtament*, do prove, that the material cup which was uſed in the ſacrament was ſubſtantially changed into the New Teſtament; and no more, than thoſe texts which affirm God to have eyes, and ears, and hands, do prove that he really hath ſo. But beſides the contrariety of this doctrine to ſcripture, nothing can be more repugnant to reaſon. It is ſo big with contradictions, and ſo ſurfeited of impoſſibilities, that it would be endleſs to reckon them up. And beſides all this, it plainly contradicts the clear and conſtant evidence of *four* of our *five* ſenſes; which, whoever contradicts, undermines the foundation of all certainty.

And then *the communion in one kind* is plainly contrary to our Saviour's inſtitution of the ſacrament in both kinds, as they themſelves acknowledge. And therefore the council of *Conſtance*, being ſenſible of this, was forced to decree it with an expreſs *non obſtante* to the inſtitution of Chriſt, and the practice of the Apoſtles and the primitive church. And their doctrine of *concomitancy* (as if the blood were in the fleſh, and together with it) will not help the matter: Becauſe in the ſacrament Chriſt's body is repreſented as broken, and pierced, and exhauſted, and drained of its blood; and his blood is repreſented as ſhed and poured out; ſo that one kind can by no means contain and exhibit both.

The next inſtance is, *the repetition of Chriſt's propitiatory ſacrifice in the maſs*, ſo often as that is celebrated: Againſt all reaſon; becauſe the ſacrifice of Chriſt once offered upon the croſs, was a full and perfect propitiation for the ſins of the whole world; and therefore ought not, becauſe it needs not, to be again repeated for that end, in any manner whatſoever. And it is directly contrary to the main ſcope of a great part of this Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, which ſhews the excellency of the Goſpel above the law in this reſpect, that the expiatory ſacrifice of the Goſpel was offered *once for all*; whereas the ſacrifices of the law were perpetually repeated. Chap. vii. 27. ſpeaking of Chriſt; *who needs not daily, as thoſe high-prieſts, to offer up ſacrifices; firſt for his own ſins, and then for the peoples: for this he did once when he offered up himſelf*. chap. ix. 26. *But once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to take away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf: And as it is appointed for all men once to die; ſo Chriſt was once offered to bear the ſins of many.* And chap. x. 10. *By the which will we are ſanctified, through the offering of the body of Jeſus Chriſt once for all.* And verſe 12. *But this man, after he had offered one ſacrifice for ſins for ever, ſat down on the right hand of God.* And verſe 14. *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are ſanctified.* There cannot be plainer texts for any thing in the Bible, than that this propitiatory ſacrifice was never to be repeated.

And whereas they ſay, that the *ſacrifice of the maſs is an unbloody ſacrifice:* This, inſtead of bringing them off, doth but intangle the matter more. For if blood be offered in the ſacrifice of the maſs, how is it an unbloody ſacrifice? What can be more bloody than blood? And if blood be not offered, how is it propitiatory? Since the Apoſtle lays it down for a certain rule, that *without ſhedding of blood, there is no remiſſion* of ſins; *i. e.* There can be no propitiation for the ſins of the living or the dead; which the church of *Rome* affirms there is.

I might have added one or two inſtances more; and then ſhould have proceeded to ſhew, in the *third* place, that we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world; which is more eſpecially and principally here intended by the Apoſtle in this exhortation.

But I ſhall proceed no farther at preſent.

The third Sermon on this Text.

SERMON VI.

Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

HEB. x. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promiſed.

IN theſe words, I have told you, are contained,

Firſt, An exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, or *hope*, *without wavering*.

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; *becauſe he is faithful that promiſed.* I am yet upon the firſt of theſe; the exhortation to Chriſtians, to be conſtant and ſteddy in the profeſſion of their religion: *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.* And that we might the better comprehend the true and full meaning of this exhortation, I ſhewed,

Firſt, *Negatively*, what is not meant and intended by it. And I mentioned theſe *two* particulars.

1. The Apoſtle doth not hereby intend, that thoſe who are capable of enquiring into, and examining the grounds of their religion, ſhould not have the liberty to do it. Nor,

2. That when upon due enquiry and examination, men are ſettled, as they think and verily believe, in the true faith and religion, they ſhould obſtinately refuſe to hear any reaſon that can be offered againſt their preſent perſuaſion. Both theſe I ſhewed to be unreaſonable, and arguments of a bad cauſe and religion: And therefore neither of them can be intended by the Apoſtle in this exhortation.

Secondly, I proceeded *poſitively* to explain the meaning of this exhortation. And to this purpoſe I propoſed,

I. To conſider *what* it is, that we are to *hold faſt*, viz. *the confeſſion* or *profeſſion of our faith*, The ancient chriſtian faith, of which every Chriſtian makes *profeſſion* in his baptiſm: For of that the Apoſtle here ſpeaks, as appears by the context; not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men, nor the impious dictates and doctrines of any church not contained in the holy ſcriptures, impoſed upon the chriſtian church; tho' with never ſo confident a pretence of the antiquity of the doctrines propoſed, or of the infallibility of the propoſers of them. And then I proceeded in the

IId place, to ſhew, *how* we are *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*. And I mentioned theſe following particulars, as probably implied in the Apoſtle's exhortation.

1. That we ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport their confidence.

2. And much more againſt the confidence of men, againſt ſcripture and reaſon, and the common ſenſe of mankind.

3. Againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Againſt all vain promiſes of being put into a ſafer condition, and groundleſs hopes of getting to heaven upon eaſier terms in another religion.

5. Againſt all the cunning arts and inſinuations of buſy and diſputing men, whoſe deſign it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain proſelytes to their party and faction.

1. We are *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport their confidence. And of this I gave ſeveral inſtances, As in the pretence of the church of *Rome* to *infallibility*, without any proof or evidence of it, either by ſcripture or miracles: I mean ſuch miracles, as are ſufficiently atteſted. For as for their legends, ſince the wiſeſt among themſelves give no credit to them, I hope, they do not expect that we ſhould believe them, or be moved

by them. And then their pretence that *the church of* Rome *is the mother and miſtreſs of all churches*; which is now made an article of their *creed.* And that *the biſhop of* Rome, *as ſucceſſor of St.* Peter *there, is by divine appointment the ſupreme and univerſal paſtor of* Chriſt's *church.* And that *it is neceſſary to ſalvation, for every human creature to be ſubject to him.* And laſtly, *their invocation and worſhip of the bleſſed Virgin and Saints departed*; without any warrant or example of any ſuch thing, either in ſcripture, or in the practice of the firſt ages of the chriſtian religion; and without ſufficient ground to believe that they hear the prayers which are put up to them.

2. Much more are we *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith,* againſt the confidence of men, contrary to ſcripture and reaſon and the common ſenſe of mankind. And here I inſtanced *in the worſhip of images*; *the locking up of the ſcriptures from the people*; *and celebrating the publick prayers and ſervice of God in an unknown tongue*; and their doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*; *their communion in one kind*; and their *daily repetition, in the ſacrifice of the maſs, of the propitiatory ſacrifice of Chriſt:* which was offered *once for all,* and is of eternal virtue and efficacy, and therefore ought not, becauſe it needs not, like *Jewiſh* ſacrifices under the law, to be repeated.

To theſe inſtances, which I have already ſpoken to, I ſhall add *one* or *two* more; as namely, That *to the due adminiſtration of the ſacraments, an intention in the miniſter at leaſt to do what the church does, is requiſite.* This is expreſly defined, and under an *anathema* upon all that ſhall ſay otherwiſe, by the council of *Trent. Seſſ.* the *ſeventh, Can.* 11th; which is to make the validity and virtue of the ſacraments to depend upon the intention of the prieſt or miniſter. So that if in the adminiſtration of baptiſm, he do not intend to baptiſe the party he pretends to baptiſe, then it is no baptiſm, and conſequently the perſon baptiſed is not made a member of *Chriſt*'s church; nor is any grace or ſpecial benefit conferred upon him; nor is he a Chriſtian. So likewiſe in the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper, if the prieſt do not intend to conſecrate the hoſt, then is it no ſacrament; and they that receive it, receive no benefit by it; and (which according to their opinion is a dreadful conſequence) by the words of conſecration, there is no change made of the elements into the body and blood of *Chriſt*, and conſequently they that give adoration to the ſacrament in ſuch caſes, worſhip bread and wine, for God; which is idolatry. And ſo likewiſe in their ſacrament of penance, though the prieſt pronounce the words of abſolution; yet if he do not intend to abſolve the penitent; though he be never ſo truly penitent, and God on his part is ready to forgive him; yet if the prieſt do not intend to do ſo, there is nothing done, and the man is ſtill in his ſin. So likewiſe in ordination, (which is another of their ſacriments) if the biſhop do not intend to ordain the man, he is no prieſt, and all that he does as a prieſt afterwards, either in adminiſtration of baptiſm or the Lord's ſupper, or the abſolution of penitents, all is vain, and of no effect. Nay, in marriage, (which they will needs have to be a ſacrament too) if the intention of the prieſt be wanting, there is nothing done, the contract is null'd, and they that are ſo married do really live in adultery, though they do not know it, nor have any ſuſpicion of it.

Now this is contrary to ſcripture and the whole tenour of the Goſpel, which promiſeth the benefit and efficacy of the ſacraments, to all thoſe that perform the conditions of the covenant which are required on their parts, and declares forgiveneſs of ſins to thoſe who confeſs them to God, and truly repent of them.

And there is not the leaſt intimation given in the bible, that the virtue and efficacy of the ſacraments does depend upon the intention of him that adminiſters them; or that the forgiveneſs of ſins is ſuſpended upon the intention or abſolution of the prieſt; but only upon the ſincere reſolution of the penitent. And ſurely nothing can be more abſurd, and contrary to reaſon, than that when men have performed all the conditions which the Goſpel requires; yet they ſhould notwithſtanding this be deprived of all the bleſſings and benefits which God hath promiſed, and intends to confer upon them; becauſe the prieſt hath not the ſame intention. So that when a man hath done all he can *to work out his own ſalvation,* he ſhall never be the nearer; only for want of that which is wholly out of his power; the right intention of the prieſt.

Beſides, that after all the boaſts of the ſafe condition of men in their church, and the moſt certain and infallible means of ſalvation to be had in it; this one principle (that the intention of the prieſts is neceſſary to the validity and virtue of the ſacraments) puts the ſalvation of men upon the greateſt hazard and uncertainty; and ſuch as it is impoſſible for any man either to diſcover or prevent, unleſs he had ſome certain way to know the heart and intention of the prieſt. For upon theſe terms, who can know whether any man be a prieſt, and really ordained, or not? Nay, whether he be a Chriſtian, and have been truly baptiſed, or not? And conſequently, whether any of his adminiſtrations be valid, and we have any benefit and advantage by them? Becauſe all this depends upon the knowledge of that, which we neither do nor can know.

So that when a man hath conſcientiouſly done all that God requires of any man to make him capable of ſalvation; yet without any fault of his, the want of intention in an idle-minded man may fruſtrate all: And tho' the man have been baptiſed, and do truly believe the Goſpel, and hath ſincerely repented of his ſins, and lived a moſt holy life; yet all this may ſignify nothing, and after all he may be no Chriſtian; becauſe his baptiſm was invalid: And all the promiſes of God to the means of ſalvation which his goodneſs and wiſdom hath preſcribed, may be of no efficacy; if the prieſt do not intend in the adminiſtration of the ſacraments to do that which God and the church intend.

Now if this be true, there is certainly no church in the world, in which the ſalvation of men runs ſo many hazards; and yet all this hazard and uncertainty has its riſe from a ſcholaſtical point, which is directly contrary to all the notions of mankind concerning the goodneſs of God, and to the clear reaſon of the thing, and to the conſtant tenour of the Goſpel; and which was never aſſerted by any of the ancient fathers; much leſs defined by any council before that of *Trent:* So that it is a doctrine new and needleſs, and in the neceſſary conſequences of it unreaſonable and abſurd to the utmoſt degree.

The laſt inſtance I ſhall mention, is *their rule of faith.* The rule of faith univerſally received and acknowledged by the chriſtian church in all ages, before the council of *Trent*, was the word of God, contained in the canonical books of holy ſcripture; which were therefore by the church called *canonical*, becauſe they were the rule of faith and manners, of the doctrines to be believed, and the duties to be practiſed by all chriſtians. But when the errors and corruptions of the *Romiſh* church were grown to the height, and the pope and his council at *Trent* were reſolved not to retrench and reform them, they ſaw it neceſſary to enlarge and lengthen out their rule; becauſe the ancient rule of the holy ſcriptures would by no means reach ſeveral of the doctrines and practices of that church, which they were reſolved to maintain and make good by one means or other: As namely, the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*; of *purgatory*; and of *the ſeven ſacraments:* And the practice of *the worſhip of ſaints, and images*; of *the ſcriptures, and the ſervice of God, in an unknown tongue*; of *indulgences*; and *the communion in one kind*; and ſeveral other ſuperſtitious practices in uſe among them.

Now to enlarge the rule to the beſt advantage for the juſtification of theſe doctrines and practices, they took theſe *two* ways.

Firſt, They have added to the *canonical* books of the Old Teſtament, which were received by the *Jewiſh* church (to whom *were committed the Oracles of God)* I ſay, to theſe they have added ſeveral *Apocryphal* books, not warranted by divine inſpiration, becauſe they were written after prophecy and divine inſpiration was ceaſed in the *Jewiſh* church; *Malachi* being the laſt of their prophets, according to the general tradition of that church. But becauſe the addition of theſe books did not make a rule of faith and practice large enough for their purpoſe; in imitation of the *Jews*, in the time of the greateſt confuſion and degeneracy of that church, they added in the

Second place to their books of ſcripture, which they call *the written Word*, an *unwritten Word*, which they call *Oral Tradition* from Chriſt and his Apoſtles; which they declare to be of equal authority with the holy ſcriptures themſelves; and that it ought to be received with the ſame pious veneration and affection: Of which traditions, they being the keepers and judges, they may extend them to what they pleaſe, and having them in their own breaſts, they may declare whatever they have a mind to, to have been a conſtant and univerſal tradition of their church; tho' it is evident to common ſenſe, that nothing can be more uncertain, and more liaable to alteration and miſtake, than *tradition*, at the diſtance of ſo many ages, brought down by word of mouth, without writing, and paſſing thro' ſo many hands. He that can think theſe to be of equal certainty and authority with what is delivered by writing, and brought down by books, undertakes the defence of a ſtrange *paradox*, viz. That *general rumour and report of things ſaid and done fifteen hundred years ago, is of equal authority and credit with a record, and a written hiſtory.*

By which proceeding of the council of *Trent*, concerning the rule of faith and practice, it is very evident, that they had no mind to bring their faith to the ancient rule, the holy ſcriptures. That they knew could not be done; and therefore they were reſolved to fit their rule to their faith. And this foundation being laid in their firſt decree, all the reſt would afterwards go on very ſmoothly. For do but give men the making of their rule, and they can make good any thing by it. And accordingly, the council of *Trent* having thus fix'd and fitted a rule to their own purpoſe; in the concluſion of that decree, they give the world fair warning, upon what grounds, and in what ways they intend to proceed in their following decrees of practice and definitions of faith. *Omnes itaque intelligant, quo ordine & via ipſa Synodus poſt jactum fidei confeſſionis fundamentum ſit progreſſura*, &c. *Be it known therefore to all men, in what order and way the ſynod, after having laid this foundation of the confeſſion of faith, will proceed; and what teſtimonies and proofs ſhe chiefly intends to make uſe of, for the confirmation of doctrines, and reformation of manners in the church.* And no doubt, all men do ſee very plainly to what purpoſe this foundation is laid of ſo large a rule of faith. And this being admitted, how eaſy is it for them to confirm and prove whatever doctrines and practices they have a mind to eſtabliſh.

But if this be a *new*, and *another foundation*, than that which the great author and founder of our religion hath laid and built his church upon, *viz. the foundation of the Prophets and Apoſtles*; it is no matter what they build upon it. And if they go about to prove any thing by the new parts of this rule; by the *Apocryphal* books which they have added to the ancient *Canon* of the ſcriptures, brought down to us by the general tradition of the chriſtian church; and by their pretended unwritten traditions: We do with reaſon reject this kind of proof, and deſire them firſt to prove their *rule*, before they pretend to prove any thing by it: For we proteſt againſt this rule, as never declared and owned by the chriſtian church, nor proceeded upon by the ancient fathers of the church, nor by any council whatſoever, before the council of *Trent*.

In vain then doth the church of *Rome* vaunt itſelf of the antiquity of their faith and religion, when the very foundation and rule of it is but of yeſterday; a new thing never before known or heard of in the chriſtian world: Whereas the foundation and rule of our religion is the word of God, contained in the holy ſcriptures; to which Chriſtians in all ages have appealed, as the *only rule* of faith and life.

I proceed now to the

Third thing I propoſed, *viz.* That we are *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world. And this ſeems more eſpecially and principally to be here intended by the Apoſtle in this exhortation.

I ſhall firſt ſpeak of the temptations of the world. And they are chiefly theſe *two*: The temptation of *faſhion* and *example*; and of *worldly intereſt* and *advantage*.

1. Of *faſhion* and *example*. This in truth and reality, is no ſtrong argument; and yet in experience and effect it is often found to be very powerful. It is frequently ſeen, that this hath many times too great an influence upon weak and fooliſh minds. Men are apt to be carried down with the ſtream, and to *follow a multitude* in that which is *evil*: But more eſpecially men are prone to be ſwayed by great examples, and to bend themſelves to ſuch an obſequiouſneſs to their ſuperiors and betters, that, in compliance with them, they are ready not only to change their affection to perſons and things as *they* do, but even their judgment alſo; and that in the greateſt and weightieſt matters, even in matters of religion, and the great concernments of another world. But this ſurely is an argument of a poor and mean ſpirit, and of a weak underſtanding, which leans upon the judgment of another, and is in truth the loweſt degree of ſervility, that a reaſonable creature can ſtoop to; and even beneath that of a ſlave, who, in the midſt of his chains and fetters, doth ſtill retain the freedom of his mind and judgment.

But I need not to urge this upon conſiderate perſons, who know better how to value their duty and obligation to God, than to be tempted to do any thing contrary thereto, merely in compliance with *faſhion* and *example*. There are ſome things in religion ſo very plain, that a wiſe and good man would ſtand alone in the belief and practice of them, and not be moved in the leaſt by the contrary example of the whole world. It was a brave reſolution of *Joſhua*; though all men ſhould forſake the God of *Iſrael*, and run aſide to other Gods, yet he would not do it, *Joſhua* xxiv. 15. *If it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the Lord, chooſe you this day whom ye will ſerve: But as for me and my houſe, we will ſerve the Lord.* It was well reſolved of *Peter*, if he had not been too confident of his own ſtrength, when he ſaid to our Saviour, *Though all men forſake thee, yet will not I.*

2. Another ſort of temptation, and which is commonly more powerful than *example*, is *worldly intereſt* and *advantage*. This is a mighty bait to a great part of mankind, and apt to work very ſtrongly upon the neceſſities of ſome, and upon the covetouſneſs and ambition of others. Some men are tempted by neceſſity, which many times makes them do ugly and reproachful things, and like *Eſau*, *for a morſel of meat to ſell their birthright and bleſſing*. Covetouſneſs tempts others to be of that religion which gives them the proſpect of the greateſt earthly advantage, either for the increaſing or ſecuring of their eſtates. When they find, that they *cannot ſerve God and Mammon*, they will *forſake the one and cleave to the other*. This was one of the great temptations to many in the primitive times, and a frequent cauſe of apoſtaſy from the faith; an eager deſire of riches, and too great a value for them; as St. *Paul* obſerves, 1 *Tim.* vi. 9, 10. *But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while ſome have coveted after, they have erred,* or been ſeduced *from the faith, and pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows.* This was the temptation which drew off *Demas* from his religion; as St. *Paul* tells us, 2 *Tim.* iv. 10 *Demas hath forſaken me, having loved this preſent world.*

Ambition is likewiſe a great temptation to proud and aſpiring minds, and makes many men falſe to their religion, when they find it a hindrance to their preferment; and they are eaſily perſuaded, that *that* is the beſt religion, which is attended with the greateſt worldly advantages, and will raiſe them to the higheſt dignity. The devil underſtood very well the force of this temptation, when he ſet upon our Saviour, and therefore reſerved it for the laſt aſſault. *He ſhewed him all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them; and ſaid to him, All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me.* And when he ſaw this would not prevail, he gave him over in deſpair, and left him. But though this be a very dazling temptation, yet there are conſiderations of that weight to be ſet over-againſt it, from the nature of religion, and the infinite concernment of it to our immortal ſouls, as is ſufficient *to quench this fiery dart of the devil*, and to put all the temptations of this world out of countenance, and to render all the riches and glory of it, in compariſon of the eternal happineſs and miſery of the other world, *but as the very ſmall duſt upon the balance.* What temptation of this world can ſtand againſt that argument of our Saviour, if it be ſeriouſly weighed and conſidered; *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and loſe his own ſoul: or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* If we would conſider things impartially, and weigh them in a juſt and equal balance; the things which concern our bodies, and this preſent life, are of no conſideration, in compariſon of the great and vaſt concernments of our immortal ſouls, and the happy or miſerable condition of our bodies and ſouls to all eternity.

And religion is a matter of this vaſt concernment; and therefore not to be bargained away and parted with by us for the greateſt things this world can offer. There is no greater ſign of a ſordid ſpirit, than to put a high value upon things of little worth; and no greater mark of folly, than to make an unequal bargain, to part with things of greateſt price, for a ſlender and trifling conſideration: As if a man of great fortune and eſtate ſhould ſell the inheritance of it for a picture, which, when he hath it, will not perhaps yield ſo much as will maintain him for one year. The folly is ſo much the greater in things of infinitely greater value; as for a man to quit God and religion, to ſell the truth and his ſoul, and to part with his everlaſting inheritance for a convenient ſervice, for a good cuſtomer, and ſome preſent advantage in his trade and profeſſion, or indeed for any condition which the fooliſh language of this world calls *a high place*, or *a great preferment*. The things which theſe men part with upon theſe cheap terms, God, and his truth, and religion, are, to thoſe who underſtand themſelves, and the juſt value of their immortal ſouls, things of ineſtimable worth, and not to be parted with by a conſiderate man for any price that this world can bid. And thoſe who are to be bought out of their religion upon ſuch low terms, and ſo eaſily parted from it, 'tis much to be feared that they have little or no religion to *hold faſt*.

Secondly, As we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt the temptations and allurements of this world: ſo likewiſe againſt the terrors of it.

Fear is a paſſion of great force; and, if men be not very reſolute and conſtant, will be apt to ſtagger them, and *to move them from their ſtedfaſtneſs:* And therefore when the caſe of ſuffering and perſecution for the truth happens, we had need *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith.* Our Saviour in the parable of the ſower, tells us, that there were many *that heard the word, and with joy received it: but when perſecution and tribulation aroſe becauſe of the word, preſently they were offended.*

And though, bleſſed be God, this be not our caſe; yet there was a time when it was the general caſe of Chriſtians, in the firſt beginning of Chriſtianity, and for ſeveral ages after, though with ſome intermiſſion and intervals of eaſe. It was then a general rule, and the common expectation of Chriſtians, that *through many tribulations they muſt enter into the kingdom of God*, and that, if *any man will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, he muſt ſuffer perſecution.* And in ſeveral ages ſince thoſe primitive times, the ſincere profeſſors of religion have, in divers places, been expoſed to moſt grievous ſufferings and perſecutions for the truth. And even at this day, in ſeveral places, the faithful ſervants of God are exerciſed with the ſharpeſt and ſoreſt trials that perhaps were ever heard of in any age; and for the ſake of God, and the conſtant profeſſion of his true religion, are *tormented and killed all the day long, and are accounted as ſheep for the ſlaughter.* It is their hard lot to be called to theſe cruel and bitter ſufferings, and our happy opportunity to be called upon for their relief; thoſe of them, I mean, that have eſcaped that terrible ſtorm and tempeſt, and have taken refuge and ſanctuary here among us, and, out of his majeſty's great humanity and goodneſs, are by his publick letters recommended to the charity of the whole nation, by the name of *diſtreſſed proteſtants.*

Let us conſider, how much eaſier our lot and our duty is, than theirs; as much as it is eaſier to compaſſionate the ſufferings, and to relieve the diſtreſſes of others, than to be ſuch ſufferers, and in ſuch diſtreſs ourſelves. Let us make their caſe our own, and then we ourſelves will be the beſt judges, how it is fit for us to demean ourſelves towards them, and to what degree we ought to extend our charity and compaſſion to them. Let us put on their caſe and circumſtances, and ſuppoſe that we were the ſufferers, and had fled to them for refuge: The ſame pity and commiſeration, the ſame tender regard and conſideration of our ſad caſe, the ſame liberal and effectual relief, that we ſhould deſire and expect, and be glad to have ſhewn and afforded to ourſelves, let us give to them; and then, I am ſure, they will want no fitting comfort and ſupport from us.

We enjoy (bleſſed be the goodneſs of God to us) great peace and plenty, and freedom from evil and ſuffering: And ſurely one of the beſt means to have theſe bleſſings continued to us, and our *tranquillity prolonged*, is to conſider and relieve thoſe who want the bleſſings which we enjoy; and the readieſt way to provoke God to deprive us of theſe bleſſings, is to *ſhut up the bowels of our compaſſion from* our diſtreſſed *brethren.* God can eaſily change the ſcene, and make our ſufferings, if not in the ſame kind, yet in one kind or other, equal to theirs; and then we ſhall *remember the afflictions of Joſeph*, and ſay, as his brethren did, when they fell into trouble, *we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we ſaw the anguiſh of his ſoul when he beſought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this diſtreſs come upon us.*

God alone knows, what ſtorms the devil may yet raiſe in the world, before the end of it: And therefore it concerns all Chriſtians, in all times and places, who have taken upon them the profeſſion of Chriſt's religion, to conſider well before-hand, and to calculate the dangers and ſufferings it may expoſe them to, and to arm ourſelves with reſolution and patience againſt the fierceſt aſſaults of temptation; conſidering the ſhortneſs of all temporal afflictions and ſufferings, in compariſon of the eternal and glorious reward of them; and the lightneſs of them too, in compariſon of the endleſs and intolerable torments of another world; to which every man expoſeth himſelf, who forſakes God, and renounceth his truth, and wounds his conſcience, to avoid temporal ſufferings.

And though *fear*, in many caſes, eſpecially if it be of death and extreme ſufferings, be a great excuſe for ſeveral actions, becauſe it may, *cadere in conſtantem virum*, happen to a reſolute man: Yet in this caſe of renouncing our religion (unleſs it be very ſudden and ſurpriſing, out of which a man recovers himſelf when he comes to himſelf, as St. *Peter* did; or the ſuffering be ſo extreme, as to put a man beſides himſelf for the time, ſo as to make him ſay or do any thing;) I ſay in this caſe of renouncing God and his truth, God will not admit *fear* for a juſt excuſe of our apoſtaſy;

which, if it be unrepented of (and the ſcripture ſpeaks of repentance in that caſe as very difficult) will be our ruin. And the reaſon is, becauſe God has given us ſuch fair warning of it; that we may be prepared for it, in the reſolution of our minds: And we enter into religion upon theſe terms, with a profeſſed expectation of ſuffering, and a firm purpoſe to lay down our lives for the truth, if God ſhall call us to it. *If any man will be my diſciple*, ſays our Lord, *let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me:* And again, *he that loveth life itſelf more than me, is not worthy of me*; *And if any man be aſhamed of me and of my words, in this unfaithful generation, of him will I be aſhamed before my father and the holy angels.*

And therefore to maſter and ſubdue this *fear*, our Saviour hath propounded great objects of terror to us, and a danger infinitely more to be dreaded, which every man runs himſelf wilfully upon, who ſhall quit the profeſſion of his religion, to avoid temporal ſufferings; *Luke* xii. 4, 5. *Fear not them that can kill the body, but after that have nothing that they can do: But I will tell you whom you ſhall fear. Fear him, who, after he hath killed, can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell*; *yea, I ſay unto you, fear him.* And to this dreadful hazard every man expoſeth himſelf, who, for the fear of men, ventures thus to offend God. Theſe are *the fearful and unbelievers* ſpoken of by St. *John*, *who ſhall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimſtone, which is the ſecond death.*

Thus you ſee, how we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt all temptations and terrors of this world. I ſhould now have proceeded to the next particular; namely, that we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt all vain promiſes of being put into a ſafer condition, and groundleſs hopes of getting to heaven upon eaſier terms in ſome other church and religion.

But this I ſhall not now enter upon.

The fourth Sermon on this Text.

SERMON VII.

Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

Heb. x. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promiſed.

IN theſe words, I have told you, are contained theſe *two* parts:

Firſt, An exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.*

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; *becauſe he is faithful that promiſed.* I am yet upon the

Firſt of theſe; The exhortation to Chriſtians, to be conſtant and ſteddy in the profeſſion of their religion: *let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.* And that we might the better comprehend the true and full meaning of this exhortation, I ſhewed,

I. *Negatively*, what is not meant and intended by it. And I mentioned theſe *two* particulars.

1. The Apoſtle doth not hereby intend, that thoſe who are capable of enquiring into, and examining the grounds and reaſons of their religion, ſhould not have the liberty to do it. Nor,

2. That when upon due enquiry and examination, men are ſettled, as they think and verily believe, in the true faith and religion, they ſhould obſtinately refuſe to hear any reaſon

ſon that can be offered againſt their preſent perſuaſion. For reaſon, when it is fairly offered, is always to be heard. I proceeded in the

IId Place, *Poſitively*, To explain the meaning of this exhortation. And to this purpoſe I propoſed to conſider,

Firſt, *What* it is that we are to *hold faſt*, viz. *the confeſſion* or *profeſſion of our faith*, the ancient chriſtian faith, which every Chriſtian makes profeſſion of in his baptiſm: Not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men, nor the imperious dictates and doctrines of any church (which are not contained in the holy ſcriptures) impoſed upon the chriſtian world, tho' with never ſo confident a pretence of the antiquity of the doctrines, or of the infallibility of the propoſers of them. And then I proceeded, in the

Second place, to ſhew, *how* we are *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*; and I mentioned theſe following particulars, as probably implied and comprehended in the Apoſtle's exhortation.

1. That we ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport that confidence.

2. And much more againſt the confidence of men, contrary to plain ſcripture, and reaſon, and the common ſenſe of mankind; under both which heads I gave ſeveral inſtances of doctrines and practices impoſed with great confidence upon the world, ſome without, and others plainly againſt ſcripture, and reaſon, and the common ſenſe of mankind.

3. Againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world; the temptations of faſhion and example, and of worldly intereſt and advantage; and againſt the terrors of perſecution and ſuffering for the truth. Thus far I have gone; I ſhall now proceed to the *two* other particulars, which remain to be ſpoken to.

4. We are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt all vain promiſes of being put into a ſafer condition, and groundleſs hopes of getting to heaven upon eaſier terms in ſome other church and religion. God hath plainly declared to us in the holy ſcriptures, upon what terms and conditions we may obtain eternal life and happineſs, and what will certainly exclude us from it; That, *except we repent*, *i. e.* without true contrition for our ſins, and forſaking of them, *we ſhall periſh*; That *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*; that *no fornicator, or adulterer, or idolater, or covetous perſon, nor any one that lives in the practice of ſuch ſins ſhall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God or Chriſt*. There is as great and unpaſſable a gulf fix'd between heaven and a wicked man, as there is betwixt heaven and hell. And when men have done all they can to debauch and corrupt the chriſtian doctrine, it is impoſſible to reconcile a wicked life with any reaſonable and well-grounded hopes of happineſs in another world. No church hath that privilege, to ſave a man upon any other terms, than thoſe which our bleſſed Saviour hath declared in his Goſpel. All religions are equal in this, that a bad man can be ſaved in none of them.

The church of *Rome* pretends their church and religion to be the only ſafe and ſure way to ſalvation; and yet if their doctrine be true, concerning the intention of the prieſt (and if it be not, they are much to blame in making it an article of their faith) I ſay, if it be true, that the intention of the prieſt is neceſſary to the validity and virtue of the ſacraments; then there is no religion in the world, that runs the ſalvation of men upon more and greater hazards and uncertainties, and ſuch as by no care and diligence of man in *working out his own ſalvation*, are to be avoided and prevented.

As for the eaſier terms of ſalvation which they offer to men, they ſignify nothing, if they be not able to make them good; which no man can reaſonably believe they can do, that hath read the Bible, and doth in any good meaſure underſtand the nature of God, and the deſign of religion. For inſtance; that after the long courſe of a moſt lewd and flagitious life, a man may be reconciled to God, and have his ſins forgiven at the laſt gaſp, upon confeſſion of them to the prieſt, with that imperfect degree of contrition for them, which they call *attrition*, together with the abſolution of the prieſt.

Now *attrition* is a trouble for ſin, merely for fear of the puniſhment of it. And this, together with *confeſſion*, and the *abſolution* of the prieſt, without any hatred of ſin for the evil and contrariety of it to the holy nature and law of God, and without the leaſt ſpark of love to God, will do the ſinner's buſineſs, and put him into a ſtate of grace and ſalvation, without any other grace or diſpoſition for ſalvation, but only the fear of hell and damnation. This, I confeſs, is eaſy: But the great difficulty is, to believe it to be true. And certainly, no man, that ever ſeriouſly conſidered the nature of God and religion, can ever be perſuaded to build the hopes of his ſalvation upon ſuch a *quick-ſand.* The abſolution of all the prieſts in the world will not procure the forgiveneſs of God for any man, that is not diſpoſed for his mercy by ſuch a repentance, as the Goſpel requires; which, I am ſure, is very different from that which is required by the council of *Trent.*

They that offer heaven to men upon ſo very large and looſe terms, give great cauſe to ſuſpect, that they will never make good their offer; the terms are ſo unreaſonably cheap and eaſy, that there muſt be ſome fraud and falſe dealing. And on the other hand, nothing ought to recommend our religion more to a wiſe and conſiderate man, than that the terms of ſalvation which we propoſe to men, *viz.* faith, and repentance, and a ſincere obedience to the precepts of the Goſpel, manifeſted in the tenour of a holy and virtuous life, are not only perfectly agreeable to the plain and conſtant declaration of holy ſcripture; but do likewiſe naturally tend to engage men moſt effectually to a good life, and thereby to make them *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light.* And therefore every body ought to be afraid of a religion, which makes ſuch laviſh offers of ſalvation, and to take heed how he ventures his ſoul upon them. For if, after all the hopes that are given of ſalvation upon ſuch and ſuch terms, the ſinner doth really miſcarry and miſs of heaven; it is but very ill comfort to him to be put into a *fool's paradiſe,* for a minute or two before he leaves the world, and the next moment after to find himſelf *in the place of torments.* I proceed to the

5*th*, and *laſt* particular I mentioned, as implied in the exhortation here in the text, *viz.* that we ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt all the cunning arts and inſinuations of buſy and diſputing men, whoſe deſign it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain proſelytes to their party and faction. To this purpoſe there are ſeveral cautions given by our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles, *Matth.* xxiv. 4. *Take heed, that no man deceive you; for many ſhall come in my name, and ſhall deceive many.* Eph. iv. 14. *That ye henceforth be no more children, toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of men;* ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ, (the word ſignifies the cunning of gameſters at dice;) *by the ſleight of men, and the cunning craftineſs whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* And chap. v. 6. *Let no man deceive you with vain words.* Col. ii. 8. *Beware, leſt any man ſpoil you through philoſophy and vain deceit*; that is, by ſophiſtry and vain reaſoning, under a pretence of philoſophy. Heb. xiii. 9. *Be not carried about with divers and ſtrange doctrines.* 2 Pet. iii. 17. *Beware, leſt you alſo, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs.* And this caution is inforced by an expreſs prediction of *a great apoſtaſy,* which ſhould happen in the chriſtian church, by which many ſhould be ſeduced by pretence of miracles, and by ſeveral arts of deceit and falſhood. This *apoſtaſy* St. *Paul* expreſly foretels, 2 Theſſ. ii. 1, 2, 3. *We beſeech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye be not ſoon ſhaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by ſpirit,* (that is, by pretence to inſpiration) *nor by word,* (or meſſage) *nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Chriſt is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day ſhall not come, except there come a falling away, and that man of ſin be revealed, the ſon of perdition.* And after a particular deſcription of him, he adds, *ver.* 9. *Whoſe coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and ſigns, and lying wonders, and in all deceitfulneſs of unrighteouſneſs in them that periſh.* From all which he concludes, *ver.* 15. *Therefore, brethren, ſtand faſt.*

The particular nature and kind of this *apoſtaſy* the ſame apoſtle deſcribes more fully, 1 *Tim.* iv. 1, 2, 3. *Now the Spirit ſpeaketh expreſly, that in the latter times ſome ſhall apoſtatize from the faith, giving heed to ſeducing ſpirits and doctrines of devils, ſpeaking lies in hypocriſy, (i. e.* under a great pretence of ſanctity, ſpreading their pernicious errors) *forbidding to marry, and commanding to abſtain from meats.* This is a very lively and pat deſcription of that *great apoſtaſy* in the chriſtian church, which began in the *weſtern* part of it, and hath ſpread itſelf far and wide. For there the ſpirit of error and falſhood has prevailed, under an hypocritical pretence of their being the only true church and true Chriſtians in the world. There marriage, and ſeveral ſorts of meats, are forbidden to ſeveral ranks and orders of men. All the difficulty is, what is here meant by *doctrines of devils*; and theſe certainly can be no other than doctrines tending to idolatry, which the ſcripture every where doth in a particular manner aſcribe to the devil, as the inventor and great promoter of it. And this is very much confirmed by what we find added in ſome ancient Greek copies in this text, which runs thus: *In the latter times ſome ſhall apoſtatize from the faith; for they ſhall worſhip the dead, as ſome alſo in Iſrael worſhipped.* And then it follows, *giving heed to ſeducing ſpirits, and doctrines of devils.* So that the particular kind of idolatry, into which ſome part of the chriſtian church ſhould apoſtatize, is here pointed at; that they ſhould worſhip ſouls departed, or the ſpirits of dead men; which was part of the heathen idolatry, into which the people of *Iſrael* did frequently relapſe. So that the Spirit of God doth here foretel ſuch an *apoſtaſy* in ſome part of the chriſtian church, as the people of *Iſrael* were guilty of, in falling into the heathen idolatry. *They ſhall be worſhippers of the dead, as the Iſraelites alſo were.*

And this is *the great and dangerous ſeduction* which the Chriſtians are ſo much cautioned againſt in the New Teſtament, and charged to *hold faſt the profeſſion of the faith* againſt the cunning arts and inſinuations of ſeducing ſpirits; not but (as I ſaid before) that we are always to have an ear open to reaſon, and to be ready to hearken and to yield to that, whenever it is fairly propoſed: But to be over-reached and rooted out of ones religion, by little ſophiſtical arts and tricks, is childiſh and ſilly. After we are, upon due trial and examination of the grounds of our religion, ſettled and eſtabliſhed in it, we ought not to ſuffer ourſelves to be removed from it, by the groundleſs pretences of confident people to *infallibility*, and to be practiſed upon by *cunning men, who lie at catch* to make proſelytes to their party. This is to be *like children, toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*

And we ought to be the more careful of ourſelves; becauſe there never was any time wherein ſeducing ſpirits were more bold and buſy to pervert men from the truth. Againſt theſe we ſhould *hold faſt* our religion, as a man would do his money in a crowd. It paſſeth in the world for a great mark of folly, when *a man and his money are ſoon parted:* But it is a ſign of much greater folly, for a man eaſily to quit his religion; eſpecially to be caught by ſome ſuch groſs methods, as the ſeducers I am ſpeaking of, commonly uſe, and which lie ſo very open to ſuſpicion; ſuch as ill-deſigning men are wont to practiſe upon a young heir, when they have inſinuated themſelves into his company, to make a prey of him. They charge him to tell no body in what company he hath been; nor to aſk the counſel and advice of his friends concerning what they have been perſuading him to; becauſe they for their own intereſt will be ſure to diſſuade him from it. Juſt thus do theſe ſeducers practiſe upon weak people. They charge them not to acquaint their miniſter, with whom they have been; nor what diſcourſe they have had about religion; nor what books have been put into their hands; becauſe then, all their kind deſign and intention towards them will be defeated. But above all, they muſt be ſure to read no books on the other ſide, becauſe they are no competent judges of points of faith; and this reading on both ſides will rather confound than clear their underſtandings. They tell them, that they have ſtated the matter truly, and would not for all the world deceive them; and they may eaſily perceive, by their earneſt application to them, that nothing but charity and a paſſionate deſire of the ſalvation of their ſouls, makes them take all theſe pains with them. But this is ſo groſs a way of proceeding, that any man of common underſtanding muſt needs diſcern by this kind treatment, that theſe men can have no honeſt deſign upon them.

To come then to a more particular conſideration of the arts and methods which they uſe, (I mean particularly thoſe of the church of *Rome)* in making proſelytes to their religion: As,

1. In allowing them to be very competent and ſufficient judges for themſelves, in the choice of their church and religion, (that is, which is the true church and religion, in which alone ſalvation is to be had) and yet telling them at the ſame time, that they are utterly incapable of judging of particular doctrines, and points of faith and practice; but for theſe they muſt rely upon the judgment of an infallible church, when they are in it; otherwiſe they will certainly run into damnable errors and miſtakes about theſe things.

And they muſt of neceſſity allow them to be ſufficient judges for themſelves in the choice of their religion; as will be evident, by conſidering in what method they proceed with their intended proſelyte.

They propoſe to him to change his church and his religion, becauſe he is in the wrong; and they will ſhew him a better, and ſuch a one as is the only true one, and in which alone ſalvation is to be had. To perſuade him hereto, they offer him ſome reaſons and arguments, or give him books to read, containing arguments to move him to make this change, to ſatisfy him of the reaſonableneſs, and to convince him of the neceſſity of it.

Now by this way of proceeding (and they can take no other) they do, whether they will or no, make the perſon, whom they are endeavouring to convert, a judge for himſelf, which church and religion is beſt; that which they would have him embrace and come over to, or that which they would perſuade him to forſake. For to what end elſe do they offer him reaſons and arguments to perſuade him to leave our church, and to come over to theirs; but that he may conſider the force and weight of them; and having conſidered them, may judge whether they be of force ſufficient to over-rule him to make this change? So that as unwilling as they are to make particular perſons judge for themſelves about points of faith, and about the ſenſe of ſcripture confirming thoſe points, (becauſe this is to leave every man to his own private ſpirit and fancy and giddy brain) yet they are compelled by neceſſity, and againſt their own principles, to allow a man in this caſe of chooſing his religion, to be a judge of the reaſons and arguments which they offer to induce him thereunto. So that, whether they will or no, they muſt permit him to be a judge for himſelf for *this once*, but not to make a practice of it, or to pretend this privilege ever after; For in acknowledgment of this great favour, of being permitted to judge for himſelf *this once* (which they do unwillingly grant him, and upon mere neceſſity) he is for ever after to reſign up his judgment to the church. And though this liberty be allowed *pro hâc vice*, and properly *to ſerve a turn*, i. e. in order to the changing of his religion; yet he is to underſtand, that he is no fit and competent judge of particular points of faith; theſe he muſt all learn from the true church when he is in it, and take them upon her authority, and in ſo doing he ſhall do very prudently, becauſe ſhe is infallible, and cannot be deceived; but he may.

But is there any ſenſe in all this, that a man ſhould be very fit and able to judge of that which they eſteem the main and fundamental point of all, namely, which is the true church and religion; and of the reaſons and arguments whereby they pretend to demonſtrate it; and of the true meaning of thoſe texts of ſcripture whereby they pretend to prove theirs to be the only true church: And yet ſhould be wholly unable to judge of particular points of faith; or of the true ſenſe of any texts of ſcripture that can be produced for the proof of thoſe points?

Is it ſo very prudent, in all the particular points of faith, for a man to rely upon the judgment of the church, becauſe ſhe is infallible; and not to truſt his own judgment about them, becauſe he is fallible, and may be deceived? And is it prudent likewiſe for this man to truſt his own judgment in the main buſineſs of all; namely, which is the true church and religion; concerning which he is as fallible in his judgment, and as liable to be deceived, as in the particular points? And if he be miſtaken in the main point, they muſt grant his miſtake to be fatal; becauſe his ſincerity, as to all the reſt, depends upon it. This is a great myſtery and riddle, that every particular man ſhould have ſo ſufficient a judgment as to this main and fundamental buſineſs, Which is the true church and religion; and ſhould have no judgment at all about particular points, fit to be truſted and relied upon: As if there were a certain judgment and prudence, *quoad hoc*; and as if all mens underſtandings were ſo framed, as to be very judicious and diſcerning in this main point of religion; but to be weak and dangerous, and blind, as to all particular points: Or, as if a man might have a very good judgment, and be fit to be truſted and relied upon, before he come into their church; but from the very moment he enters into it, his judgment were quite loſt and good for nothing: For this in effect and by interpretation they ſay, when they allow a man to be very able to judge which is the true church and religion; but ſo ſoon as he hath diſcovered and embraced that, to have no judgment of his own afterwards of any point of religion whatſoever; and a very tempting argument it is to any man that hath judgment to enter into that church.

2. Another art they uſe with their intended proſelyte, in order to his making a right choice of his religion, is to caution him, to hear and read only the arguments and books which are on one ſide. But now admitting their deſigned proſelyte to be juſt ſuch a judge, and ſo far they will allow him to be, and no farther, *viz.* which is the true church; but to have no fitneſs and ability at all to judge of particular points of faith: Yet methinks, they put a very odd condition, and untoward reſtraint upon this judge, in telling him, (as they certainly uſe to do thoſe whom they would pervert) that he muſt have no diſcourſe, nor read any books, but only on that ſide which they would gain him

to; becauſe that is the way to perplex and confound him, ſo that he ſhall never be able to come to a clear judgment and reſolution in the matter. But will any man admit this way of proceeding in a temporal caſe? This is juſt as if in a cauſe of the greateſt conſequence, the counſel on one ſide ſhould go about to perſuade the judge, that it is only fit to hear what he hath to ſay in the caſe; that he will open it very plainly, and ſtate the matter in difference ſo clearly and impartially, and bring ſuch ſtrong reaſons and proofs for what he ſays, that he ſhall not need to hear any thing on the other ſide, but may proceed to judgment without any more ado: But if, when the matter is thus laid before him ſo plainly, and is even ripe for judgment, he will trouble himſelf needleſly to hear the other ſide; this will caſt them back where they firſt began, and bring the matter to an endleſs wrangling, and ſo confound and puzzle his underſtanding, that he ſhall never be able to paſs any clear judgment in the cauſe.

What, think we, would a judge ſay to ſuch a bold and ſenſeleſs pleader? The caſe is the ſame, and the abſurdity every whit as groſs and palpable, in preſſing any man to make a judgment in a matter which infinitely more concerns him, upon hearing only the reaſons and arguments on one ſide.

3. Another art which they uſe in making proſelytes, is to poſſeſs them, that there is but one thing that they are mainly concern'd to inquire into, and that is this; Since there is but one true catholick church of Chriſt upon earth, out of which there is no ſalvation to be had; which that true church is? And when they have found that out, that will teach them in a moſt infallible way the true faith and religion, and all things that are neceſſary to be believed or done by them, in order to their ſalvation; ſo that they have nothing to do, but to ſatisfy themſelves in this ſingle enquiry, Which is the true catholick church of Chriſt? This is the *unum neceſſarium*, the one thing neceſſary; and when they have found out this, and are ſatisfied about it, they need to enquire no farther; this church will fully inſtruct and ſatisfy them in all other things. And this I cannot deny to be a very artificial way of proceeding, and to ſerve their purpoſe very well; for they have theſe two great advantages by it.

1. That it makes the work ſhort, and ſaves them a great deal of labour, by bringing the whole buſineſs to one ſingle enquiry: And when they have gained this point, that this ſingle queſtion is all that they need to be ſatisfied in; then they have nothing to do, but to ply and puzzle the man with their motives of credibility, and marks of the true church; and to ſhew, as well as they can, how theſe marks agree to their church, and are all to be found in it, and in no other; and to ſet out to the beſt advantage the glorious privileges of their church, the miraculous things that have been, and are ſtill daily done in it, and the innumerable multitude of their ſaints and martyrs; and if theſe general things take and ſink into them, their work is in effect done.

2. Another great advantage they have by it, is, that by bringing them to this method, they divert and keep them off from the many objections againſt their church and religion, namely, the errors and corruptions which we charge them withal. For this is the thing they are afraid of, and will by no means be brought to; to vindicate and make good their innovations in faith and practice, ſo plainly in many things contrary to ſcripture, and to the faith and practice of the primitive church; as the doctrines of *tranſubſtantiation*, of *purgatory*, *the Pope's ſupremacy*, of *the infallibility of their church*, of their *ſeven ſacraments* inſtituted by Chriſt, and of *the intention of the prieſt* being neceſſary to the validity and virtue of the ſacraments. And then ſeveral of their practices; as of the *worſhip* of *images*, of *the invocation of angels and ſaints*, of the *ſervice of God*, and *the ſcriptures in an unknown tongue*, and the *communion in one kind*; and ſeveral other things, ſo plainly contrary to the ſcriptures, and the practice and uſage of the primitive church, that almoſt the meaneſt capacity may eaſily be made ſenſible and convinced of it. Theſe are ſore places, which they deſire not to have touched, and therefore they uſe all poſſible artifice to keep men at a diſtance from them; partly, becauſe the particular diſcuſſion of them is tedious, and it requires more than ordinary ſkill, to ſay any thing that is tenable for them, and ſo to paint and varniſh them over, as to hide the corruptions and deformities of them; but chiefly becauſe they are conſcious to themſelves, that as in all theſe points they are upon the defenſive, ſo they are alſo upon very great diſadvantages; and therefore to avoid, if it be poſſible, being troubled with them, they have deviſed this ſhorter, and eaſier, and more convenient way of making proſelytes.

Not that they are always able to keep themſelves thus within their trenches; but are ſometimes, whether they will, or no, drawn out to encounter ſome of theſe objections:

But they rid themſelves of them as ſoon, and as dexterouſly as they can, by telling thoſe that make them, that they will hereafter give them full ſatisfaction to all theſe matters, when they are gotten over the firſt and main enquiry, Which is the true church? For if they can keep them to this point, and gain them to it, they can deal with them more eaſily in the reſt: For when they can once ſwallow this principle, that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church, and conſequently, as they have told them all along, infallible; this infallibility of the church once entertained, will cover a multitude of particular errors and miſtakes; and it will very much help to cure the weakneſs and defects of ſome particular doctrines and practices, and at laſt to ſilence and over-rule all objections againſt them. So that the benefit and advantage of this method is viſibly and at firſt ſight very great; and therefore no wonder, they are ſo ſteddy and conſtant to it, and do ſo obſtinately inſiſt upon it. But how convenient ſoever it be to them, it is, I am ſure, very unreaſonable in itſelf; and that upon theſe accounts.

1. Becauſe the true church doth not conſtitute and make the true chriſtian faith and doctrine; but it is the true chriſtian faith and doctrine, the profeſſion whereof makes the true church; and therefore, in reaſon and order of nature, the firſt enquiry muſt be, what is the true faith and doctrine of Chriſt; which by him was delivered to the Apoſtles, and by them publiſhed and made known to the world, and by their writings tranſmitted and conveyed down to us? And this being found, every ſociety of Chriſtians which holds this doctrine, is a true part of the catholick church; and all the Chriſtians throughout the world that agree in this doctrine, are the one true catholick church.

2. The enquiry about the true church can have no iſſue, even according to their own way of proceeding, without a due examination of the particular doctrines and practices of that church, the communion whereof they would perſuade a man to embrace. We will admit at preſent this to be the firſt enquiry, which is the true church? Let us now ſee in what way they manage this, to gain men over to their church. They tell them that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church of Chriſt. The truth of this aſſertion we will particularly examine afterwards, when we come to conſider the next ſtep of their method in dealing with their converts. At preſent I ſhall only take notice in the general, what way they take to prove this aſſertion; namely, that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church; and that is, by the notes and marks of the true church, which they call their *motives of credibility*; becauſe by theſe they deſign to perſuade them, that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church. I ſhall not now reckon up all the notes and marks which they give of the true church; but only obſerve, that one of their principal marks of the true church is this; that the faith and doctrine of it be agreeable to the doctrine of the primitive and apoſtolick church, *i. e.* to the doctrine delivered by our Saviour and his Apoſtles: And this *Bellarmine* makes one of the marks of the true church. And they muſt unavoidably make it ſo; becauſe the true faith and doctrine of Chriſt is that which indeed conſtitutes the true church. But if this be an eſſential mark of the true church, then no man can poſſibly know the church of *Rome* to be the true church, till he have examined the particular doctrines and practices of it, and the agreement of them with the primitive doctrine and practice of chriſtianity; and this neceſſarily draws on and engages them in a diſpute of the particular points and differences betwixt us; which is the very thing they would avoid by this method, and which I have now plainly ſhewed they cannot do, becauſe they cannot poſſibly prove their church to be the true church, without ſhewing the conformity of their doctrines and practices to the doctrine and practice of the primitive and apoſtolick church; and this will give them work enough, and will, whether they will or no, draw them out of their hold and faſtneſs, which is to amuſe people with a general enquiry which is the true church? without deſcending to the examination of their particular doctrines and practices. But this they muſt of neceſſity come to, before they can prove by the notes and marks of the true church, that theirs is the true church.

And this is a demonſtration, that their method of ſatisfaction, as it is unnatural and unreaſonable, ſo it cannot ſerve the purpoſe they aim at by it; which is, to divert men from the examination of the particular points in difference between the church of *Rome* and us, and to gain them over to them by a wile and trick; becauſe the very method they take to prove themſelves to be the true catholick church, will inforce them to juſtify all their particular doctrines and practices, before they can finiſh this proof.

And here we fix our foot, that the ſingle queſtion and point, upon which they would put the whole iſſue of the matter, cannot poſſibly be brought to any reaſonable iſſue, without a particular diſcuſſion and examination of the points in difference betwixt their church and ours: And when they can make out theſe to be agreeable to the primitive doctrine and practice of the chriſtian church, we have reaſon to be ſatisfied, that the church of *Rome* is a church in the communion whereof a man may be ſafe: But till that be made out, they have done nothing to perſuade any man that underſtands himſelf, that it is ſafe, much leſs neceſſary to be of their communion. But if particular points muſt be diſcuſſed and cleared, before a man can be ſatisfied in the enquiry after the true church; then they muſt allow their intended convert to be a judge likewiſe of particular points; and if he be ſufficient for that too, before he comes into their church, I do not ſee of what uſe the infallibility of the church will be to him, when he is in it.

SERMON VIII.

The fifth Sermon on this Text.

Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

HEB. X. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promiſed.

I Have already made a conſiderable progreſs in my diſcourſe upon theſe words, in which I told you, there is an exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*: And an argument or encouragement thereto, becauſe *he is faithful that promiſed*. I am yet upon the *firſt* of theſe, the exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*; by which, I told you, the Apoſtle doth not intend, that thoſe who are capable of examining the grounds and reaſons of their religion, ſhould not have the liberty to do it; nor that, when, upon due enquiry, they are, as they verily believe, eſtabliſhed in the true faith and religion, they ſhould obſtinately refuſe to hear any reaſon that is fairly offered againſt their preſent perſuaſion.

And then I proceeded to ſhew *poſitively*.

Firſt, *What* it is that we are exhorted *to hold faſt*, viz. *the confeſſion*, or *profeſſion of our faith*; the ancient chriſtian faith, of which every Chriſtian makes profeſſion in his baptiſm. For it is of *that* the Apoſtle here ſpeaks, as appears plainly by the context.

Secondly, How we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*. And of this I gave account in theſe following particulars.

1. We ſhould *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport that confidence.

2. And much more againſt the confidence of men, contrary to plain ſcripture and reaſon, and the common ſenſe of mankind; of which I gave you particular inſtances.

3. Againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Againſt all vain promiſes of being put into a ſafer condition, and groundleſs hopes of getting to heaven upon eaſier terms in ſome other church and religion. I am now upon the

5*th*, and *laſt* particular I mentioned, namely, that we are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt all the cunning arts and inſinuations of buſy and diſputing men, whoſe deſign it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to make proſelytes to their party and faction. I have already mentioned ſome of the arts which they uſe, (I mean particularly them of the church of *Rome*) in making proſelytes to their religion; and I have ſhewn the abſurdity and unreaſonableneſs of them. As, *Firſt*, In allowing men to be very competent and ſufficient judges for themſelves, in the choice of their religion: (*i. e.* which is the true church and religion in which alone ſalvation is to be had;) and yet telling them at the ſame time, that they are utterly incapable of judging of particular doctrines and points of faith. As for theſe, they muſt rely upon the judgment of an infallible church; and if they do not, they will certainly run into damnable errors and miſtakes.

And they muſt of neceſſity allow them the firſt, a ſufficient ability to judge for themſelves in the choice of their religion: Otherwiſe in vain do they offer them arguments to perſuade them to theirs; if they cannot judge of the force of them. But now, after this, to deny them all ability to judge of particular doctrines and points of faith, is a very abſurd, and inconſiſtent pretence.

Secondly, Another art they uſe, in order to their making a right choice of their religion, is earneſtly to perſuade them to hear and read only the arguments and books on their ſide: Which is juſt as if one ſhould go about to perſuade a judge, in order to the better underſtanding and clearer deciſion of a cauſe, to hear only the counſel on one ſide.

Thirdly, They tell them, that the only thing they are to enquire into, is, which is the true church, the one catholick church mentioned in the creed, out of which there is no ſalvation; and when they have found that, they are to rely upon the authority of that church, which is infallible, for all other things. And this method they wiſely take, to avoid particular diſputes about the innovations and errors which we charge them withal. But I have ſhewn at large, that this cannot be the firſt enquiry: Becauſe it is not the true church, that makes the true chriſtian faith and doctrine: But the profeſſion of the true chriſtian faith and doctrine, which makes the true church.

Beſides, their way of proving their church to be the only true church, being by the marks and properties of the true church, of which the chief is, the conformity of their doctrines and practices with the primitive and apoſtolical church, this unavoidably draws on an examination of their particular doctrines and practices, whether they be conformable to thoſe of the primitive and apoſtolical church, before their great enquiry, *which is the true church?* can be brought to an iſſue; which, it is plain, it can never be, without entering into the ocean of particular diſputes, which they deſire above all things to avoid. So that they are never the nearer by this method: they can neither ſhorten their work by it, nor keep off the examination of their particular errors and corruptions; which are a very ſore place, and they cannot endure we ſhould touch it.

I ſhall now proceed to diſcover ſome other arts and methods which they uſe in ſeducing people to their church and religion, and ſhall be as brief in them as I can.

Fourthly, They pretend, that the *Roman* church is the catholick church, *i. e.* the viſible ſociety of all Chriſtians, united to the biſhop of *Rome*, as the ſupreme paſtor and viſible head of Chriſt's church upon earth: From whence it clearly follows, that it is neceſſary to all Chriſtians to join themſelves to the communion of the *Roman* church; otherwiſe they cannot be members of the catholick church of Chriſt, out of which there is no ſalvation.

We grant the conſequence, that if the *Roman* church be the catholick church it is neceſſary to be of that communion; becauſe out of the catholick church there is ordinarily no ſalvation to be had. But how do they prove, that the *Roman* church is the catholick church? They would fain have us ſo civil, as to take this for granted: Becauſe if we do not, they do not well know how to go about to prove it. And indeed, ſome things are obſtinate, and will not be proved without ſo much trouble and difficulty, that it is better to let them alone; and by the confident aſſertion of them, by importunity, and by any other fair means, to get them believed, without proof of this ſtubborn ſort of propoſitions, which will admit of no proof. This is one, that a part is the whole; or which is all one, that the *Roman* church is the catholick church. For that it is but a part of the chriſtian church, and not the beſt part neither, but perhaps the very worſt and moſt corrupt of all the reſt, is no difficult matter to prove, and hath been often done. But now to prove the church of *Rome* to be the catholick church, that is, the whole ſociety of all true Chriſtians in the world, theſe following particulars ought to be clearly ſhewn and made out.

1. A plain conſtitution of our Saviour, whereby St. *Peter*, and his ſucceſſors at *Rome*, are made the ſupreme head and paſtors of the whole chriſtian church. For St. *Peter* firſt. Can they ſhew any ſuch conſtitution in the Goſpel, or can they produce the leaſt proof and evidence out of the hiſtory of the Acts and the Epiſtles of the Apoſtles, that

St. *Peter* was acknowledged for ſuch by the reſt of the Apoſtles? Nay is there not clear evidence there to the contrary, that in the firſt council of the chriſtian church at *Jeruſalem*, St. *James*, the biſhop of *Jeruſalem*, was, if not ſuperior, at leaſt equal to him? Does St. *Paul* acknowledge any ſuperiority of St. *Peter* over him? Nay, does he not upon ſeveral occaſions declare himſelf equal to the chiefeſt Apoſtles, even to St. *Peter* himſelf? And is this conſiſtent with a plain conſtitution of our Lord's making St. *Peter* ſupreme head and paſtor of the chriſtian church?

But ſuppoſe this to have been ſo; where doth it appear, by any conſtitution of our Saviour, that this authority was derived to his ſucceſſors? And if it were, why to his ſucceſſors at *Rome*, rather than at *Antioch*, where he was firſt, and unqueſtionably biſhop? They muſt acknowledge, that when he was biſhop of *Antioch*, he was the ſupreme head and paſtor of the whole chriſtian church; and then the ſtyle muſt have been, the *Antiochian* catholick church, as it is now the *Roman* catholick. But do they find any footſteps of ſuch a ſtyle in eccleſiaſtical hiſtory?

2. To make good this propoſition, that the *Roman* church is the catholick church, they are in conſequence obliged to affirm and believe, that the churches of *Aſia*, which were excommunicated by the biſhops of *Rome*, for not keeping *Eaſter* as they did; and the churches of *Aſia* and *Africa*, which were excommunicated by the ſame biſhop, upon the point of rebaptiſing hereticks, that all theſe, by being turned out of the communion of the *Roman* church, were alſo cut off from the catholick church, and from a poſſibility of ſalvation. This the church of *Rome* themſelves will not affirm; and yet, if to be caſt out of the communion of the *Roman*, and the catholick church, be all one, they muſt affirm it.

3. In conſequence of this propoſition, that the church of *Rome* is the catholick church, they ought to hold, that all baptiſm out of the communion of their church is void and of none effect. For if it be good; then it makes the perſons baptiſed, members of the catholick church; and then thoſe that are out of the communion of the *Roman* church, may be true members of the catholick church; and then the *Roman*, and the catholick church are not all one. But the church of *Rome* holds the baptiſm of hereticks, and of thoſe that are out of the communion of their church, to be good; which is a demonſtration, that the *Roman* church neither is the catholick church; nor if ſhe believe conſiſtently, can ſhe think herſelf to be ſo.

4. In conſequence of this propoſition, all the Chriſtians in the world, which do not yield ſubjection to the biſhop of *Rome*, and acknowledge his ſupremacy, are no true parts of the catholick church, nor in a poſſibility of ſalvation. And this does not only exclude thoſe of the reformed religion from being members of the catholick church; but the *Greeks*, and the *Eaſtern* churches; *i. e. four* of the *five* patriarchal churches of the chriſtian world; which taken together, are really greater than thoſe in communion with the church of *Rome*. And this the church of *Rome* does affirm, concerning all thoſe churches and Chriſtians, which refuſe ſubjection to the biſhop of *Rome*, that they are out of the communion of the catholick church, and a capacity of ſalvation. But ſurely it is not poſſible, that the true catholick church of Chriſt can have ſo little charity as this comes to; and to a wiſe man there needs no other demonſtration than this, that the church of *Rome* is ſo far from being the whole chriſtian church, that it is a very arrogant and uncharitable part of it.

5. *And laſtly*; In conſequence of the truth of this propoſition, and of the importance of it to the ſalvation of ſouls, and to the peace and unity of the chriſtian church, they ought to produce expreſs mention of the *Roman* catholick church, in the ancient creeds of the chriſtian church. For if this propoſition, that the *Roman* church is the catholick, be true; it was always ſo, and always of the greateſt importance to the ſalvation of men, and the peace and unity of the chriſtian church: And if it were ſo, and always believed to be ſo, by the chriſtian church, as they pretend; what reaſon can be imagined, why the ancient chriſtian church ſhould never ſay ſo, nor put an article of ſuch conſequence and importance in expreſs words in their creeds; nor why ſhould they not have uſed the ſtyle of *Roman* catholick as familiarly then, as they do now in the *Roman* church? a plain evidence that this is a new ſtyle which they uſe when they give themſelves the title of the *Roman* catholick church; and that the ancient chriſtian church knew better, than to call one part of the catholick church the whole. I am ſure, that *Æneas Sylvius* (who was afterwards pope *Pius* the Second) ſays, that before the council of *Nice*, little reſpect was had to the *Roman* church. But how does this conſiſt with their preſent pretence,

that the *Roman* church is, and always hath been the catholick church; and that the biſhop of *Rome* is by Chriſt's appointment, the ſupreme paſtor, and viſible head of the whole chriſtian church? Is it poſſible, that this ſhould be believed in the chriſtian church before the council of *Nice*; and yet little reſpect to be had at that time to the *Roman* church? This indeed was ſaid by *Æneas Sylvius* before he ſat in the infallible chair; but is never the leſs true for that.

Fifthly, The next ſtep of their method is, that the *Roman* church is infallible; and by this means they have a certain remedy againſt hereſy, and a judge of controverſies, from which there is no appeal, which we want in our church. And this is a glorious privilege indeed, if they could prove that they had it, and that it would be ſo certain a remedy againſt hereſy, and give a final deciſion to all controverſies. But there is not one tittle of all this, of which they are able to give any tenable proof: For,

1. All the pretence for their infallibility relies upon the truth of the former propoſition, that the church of *Rome* is the catholick church, and *that* they ſay is infallible: And I have already ſhewn, that that propoſition is not only deſtitute of any good proof; but is as evidently falſe as that a part of a thing is the whole.

2. But ſuppoſing it were true, that the *Roman* church were the catholick church; yet it is neither evident in itſelf, nor can be proved by them, that the catholick church of every age is infallible, in deciding all controverſies of religion. It is granted by all Chriſtians, that our Saviour and his Apoſtles were infallible, in the delivery of the chriſtian doctrine; and they proved their infallibility by miracles; and this was neceſſary at firſt for the ſecurity of our faith: But this doctrine being once delivered and tranſmitted down to us in the holy ſcriptures, written by the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles who were infallibly aſſiſted by the holy Ghoſt; we have now a certain and infallible rule of faith and practice, which, with the aſſiſtance and inſtruction of thoſe guides and paſtors which Chriſt hath appointed in his church, is ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary. And as there is no evidence of the continuance of infallibility in the guides and paſtors of the church, in the ages which followed the Apoſtles; becauſe miracles are long ſince ceaſed: So there is no need of the continuance of it, for the preſervation of the true faith and religion; becauſe God hath ſufficiently provided for that, by that infallible rule of faith and manners which he hath left to his church in the holy ſcriptures, *which are* every way ſufficient and *able to make* both paſtors and people *wiſe unto ſalvation.*

3. As for a certain remedy againſt hereſy, it is certain God never intended there ſhould be any; no more than he hath provided a certain remedy againſt ſin and vice; which ſurely is every whit as contrary to the chriſtian religion, and therefore as fit to be provided againſt, as hereſy: But it is certain in experience, that God hath provided no certain and effectual remedy againſt ſin and vice; for which I can give no other reaſon, but that God does that which he thinks beſt and fitteſt, and not what we are apt to think to be ſo.

Beſides that infallibility is not a certain remedy againſt hereſy. The Apoſtles were certainly infallible; and yet they could neither prevent nor extinguiſh hereſy; which never more abounded than in the Apoſtles times. And St. *Paul* expreſly tells us, 1 *Cor.* xi. 19. *That there muſt be hereſies*; *that they which are approved may be made manifeſt.* And St. *Peter*, the 2d *Epiſt.* ii. 1. *That there ſhould be falſe teachers among Chriſtians, who ſhould privily bring in damnable hereſies*; *and that many ſhould follow their pernicious ways.* But now if *there muſt be hereſies*; either the church muſt not be infallible, or infallibility in the church is no certain remedy againſt them.

I proceed to the next ſtep they make, *viz.*

Sixthly, That Chriſt hath always a viſible church upon earth: and that they can ſhew a church, which from the time of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, hath always made a viſible profeſſion of the ſame doctrines and practices which are now believed and practiſed in the church of *Rome:* But that we can ſhew no viſible church, that from the time of Chriſt and his Apoſtles hath always oppoſed the church of *Rome*, in thoſe doctrines and practices which we now revile and find fault with in their church.

That Chriſt hath always had, and ever ſhall have to the end of the world, a viſible church, profeſſing and practiſing his true faith and religion, is agreed on both ſides: But we ſay, that he hath no where promiſed, that this ſhall be free from all errors and corruptions in faith and practice. This the churches planted by the Apoſtles themſelves were not, even in their times, and during their abode amongſt them; and yet they were true parts of the chriſtian catholick church. In the following ages, errors and corruptions and ſuperſtitions did by degrees creep in and grow up in ſeveral parts of the church; as St. *Auguſtin*, and others of the fathers complain of in their times. Since that, ſeveral famous parts of the chriſtian church, both in *Aſia* and *Africa*, have not only been greatly corrupted, but have apoſtatiſed from the faith; ſo that in many places there are hardly any footſteps of chriſtianity among them. But yet ſtill Chriſt hath had in all theſe ages a viſible church upon earth; tho' perhaps no part of it at all times free from ſome errors and corruptions; and in ſeveral parts of it great corruptions both in faith and practice; and in none I think more and longer than in the church of *Rome*, for all ſhe boaſts herſelf, like old *Babylon*, Iſa. xlvii. 7, 8. *That ſhe is a Lady for ever; and ſays in her heart, I am, and none elſe beſides me*; and like the church of *Laodicea*, Revel. iii. 17. which ſaid, *I am rich, and increaſed with goods, and have need of nothing*; when the Spirit of God ſaith, that *ſhe was wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and knew it not*.

Thus the church of *Rome* boaſts, that ſhe hath in all ages been the true viſible church of Chriſt, (and none beſides her) free from all errors in doctrine, and corruptions in practice; and that from the age of Chriſt and his Apoſtles ſhe hath always profeſſed the ſame doctrines and practices which ſhe does at this day. Can any thing be more ſhameleſs than this? Did they always believe *tranſubſtantiation?* let their pope *Gelaſius* ſpeak for them; who expreſly denies, that in the ſacrament there is any ſubſtantial change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Chriſt. Was this always an article of their faith, and neceſſary to be believed by all Chriſtians? let *Scotus*, and ſeveral other of their ſchoolmen and learned writers ſpeak for them. Was *purgatory* always believed in the *Roman* church, as it is now defined in the council of *Trent?* let ſeveral of their learned men ſpeak. In what father, in what council before that of *Trent*, do they find Chriſt to have inſtituted juſt *ſeven ſacraments*, neither more nor leſs? and for practices in their religion, they themſelves will not ſay, that in the ancient chriſtian church the ſcriptures were withheld from the people, and lock'd up in an unknown tongue; and that the publick ſervice of God, the prayers and leſſons were read, and the ſacraments celebrated, in an unknown tongue; and that the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper was given to the people only in one kind. Where do they find in holy ſcripture, or in the doctrine and practice of the ancient chriſtian church, any command or example for the worſhip of images, for the invocation of ſaints and angels, and the bleſſed Virgin; which do now make a great part of their religion? nay, is not the doctrine of the ſcriptures, and of the ancient fathers plainly againſt all theſe practices? With what face then can it be ſaid, that the church of *Rome* hath made a conſtant viſible profeſſion of the ſame faith and practice in all ages, from the time of Chriſt and his Apoſtles? Or would the primitive church of *Rome*, if it ſhould now viſit the earth again, own the preſent church of *Rome* to be the ſame in all matters of faith and practice, that it was when they left it?

And whereas they demand of us, to ſhew a viſible church from the time of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, that hath always oppoſed the church of *Rome*, in thoſe points of doctrine and practice which we object to them; what can be more impertinent than this demand? When they know, that in all theſe points we charge them with innovations in matters of faith and practice, and ſay that thoſe things came in by degrees, ſeveral ages after the Apoſtles time, ſome ſooner, ſome later; as we are able to make good, and have done it. And would they have us ſhew them a viſible church, that oppoſed theſe errors and corruptions in their church, before ever they appeared? This we do not pretend to ſhew. And ſuppoſing they had not been at all oppoſed, when they appeared, nor a long time after, nor till the reformation; yet if they be errors and corruptions of the chriſtian doctrine, and contrary to the holy ſcriptures, and to the faith and practice of the primitive church; there is no preſcription againſt truth. 'Tis never too late for any church to reject thoſe errors and corruptions, and to reform itſelf from them.

The bottom of all this matter is, they would have us to ſhew them a ſociety of Chriſtians, that in all ages have preſerved itſelf free from all ſuch errors and corruptions as we charge them withal; or elſe we deny the perpetual viſibility of the catholick church. No ſuch matter. We ſay, the church of Chriſt hath always been viſible in every age ſince Chriſt's time; and that the ſeveral ſocieties of Chriſtians, profeſſing the chriſtian doctrine, and laws of Chriſt, have made up the catholick church; ſome parts whereof have in ſeveral ages fallen into great errors and corruptions; and no part of the catholick into more and greater than the church of *Rome*; ſo that it requires the utmoſt of our charity, to think that they are a true, tho' a very unſound and corrupt part of the catholick church of Chriſt.

We acknowledge likewiſe, that we were once involved in the like degeneracy; but by the mercy of God, and pious care and prudence of thoſe that were in authority, are happily reſcued out of it: And tho' we were not out of the catholick church before; yet ſince our reformation from the errors and corruptions of the church of *Rome*, we are in it upon better terms, and are a much ſounder part of it; and I hope by the mercy and goodneſs of God, we ſhall for ever continue ſo.

So that to the perpetual viſibility of Chriſt's church, it is not neceſſary, that the whole chriſtian church, nor indeed that any part of it ſhould be free from all errors and corruptions. Even the churches planted by the Apoſtles in the primitive times were not ſo. St. *Paul* reproves ſeveral doctrines and practices in the church of *Corinth*, and of *Coloſſe*, and of *Galatia*; and the Spirit of God, ſeveral things in the ſeven churches of *Aſia*: And yet all theſe were true parts and members of the catholick church of Chriſt, notwithſtanding theſe faults and errors; becauſe they all agreed in the main and eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity. And when more and greater corruptions grew upon the church, or any part of it, the greater reaſon and need there was of a reformation. And as every particular perſon hath a right to reform any thing that he finds amiſs in himſelf ſo far as concerns himſelf; ſo much more every national church hath a power within itſelf, to reform itſelf from all errors and corruptions, and by the ſanction of the catholick authority to confirm that reformation; which is our caſe here in *England*. And whatever part of the church, how great and eminent ſoever, excludes from her communion ſuch a national church, for reforming herſelf from plain errors and corruptions, clearly condemned by the word of God, and by the doctrine and practice of the primitive chriſtian church, is undoubtedly guilty of *Schiſm*. And this is the truth of the caſe between us and the church of *Rome*. And no blind talk about a perpetual viſible church can render us guilty of *Schiſm*, for making a real reformation; or acquit them of it, for caſting us out of their communion for that cauſe.

Seventhly, and *laſtly*, (to mention no more) they pretend, that we delude the people, by laying too much ſtreſs upon the ſcripture, and making it the only rule of faith and manners: whereas ſcripture and tradition together make up the entire rule of faith; and not ſcripture interpreted by every man's private fancy, but by tradition carefully preſerved in the church. So that it ought to be no wonder, if ſeveral of their doctrines and practices cannot be ſo clearly made out by ſcripture, or perhaps ſeem contrary to it, as it may be expounded by a private ſpirit; but not as interpreted by the tradition of the church, which can only give the true ſenſe of ſcripture. And therefore they are to underſtand, that ſeveral of thoſe doctrines and practices, which we object againſt, are moſt clearly proved by the tradition of their church, which is of equal authority with ſcripture.

In this objection of theirs, which they deſign for the cover of all their errors and corruptions, there are ſeveral things diſtinctly to be conſidered, which I ſhall do as briefly as I can.

Firſt, Whereas it is ſuggeſted, that we delude the people by laying too much ſtreſs upon the ſcriptures, (which certainly we cannot well do, if it be the word of God) it ought to be conſidered, whether they do not delude and abuſe them infinitely more, in keeping the ſcriptures from them, and not ſuffering them to ſee that which they cannot deny to be at leaſt a conſiderable part of the rule of chriſtian doctrine and practice. Doth it not by this dealing of theirs appear very ſuſpicious, that they are extremely afraid that the people ſhould examine their doctrine and practice by this rule? For what other reaſon can they have to conceal it from them?

Secondly, Whereas they affirm, that ſcripture alone is not the rule of chriſtian faith and practice, but that ſcripture and oral tradition preſerved in the church, and delivered down from hand to hand, make up the entire rule; I would fain know, whence they learned this new doctrine of the rule of faith. I know, that the council of *Trent* declares it for the rule they intend to proceed upon, and make uſe of, for the confirmation and proof of their following determinations and decrees. But did any of the ancient councils of the chriſtian church lay down his rule, and proceed upon it? Did not *Conſtantine* the emperor, at the opening of the *firſt general council*, lay the Bible before them, as the only rule, according to which they were to proceed? and this with the approbation of all thoſe holy fathers that were aſſembled in that council? And did not following councils proceed upon the ſame rule? Do any of the ancient fathers ever mention any rule of chriſtian faith and practice, beſides the holy ſcriptures, and the ancient creed; which becauſe it is an abridgment of the neceſſary articles of chriſtian faith contained in the holy ſcriptures, is by them frequently called *the rule of faith?* Do not the ſame fathers frequently and expreſly ſay, that the ſcriptures are a perfect rule, and that all things are plainly contained in them, which concern faith and life; and that whatever cannot be proved by teſtimony of ſcripture, is to be rejected? All this I am ſure I can make good, by innumerable expreſs teſtimonies of the ancient fathers, which are well known to thoſe that are verſed in them. By what authority then hath the council of *Trent* ſet up this new rule, unknown to the chriſtian church for one thouſand five hundred years? And who gave them this authority? The plain truth is, the neceſſity of it for the defence of the errors and corruptions which they had embraced, and were reſolved not to part with, forced them to lengthen out the rule; the old rule of the holy ſcriptures being too ſhort for their purpoſe.

Thirdly, Whereas they pretend, that holy ſcripture, as expounded by a private ſpirit, may not ſeem ſo favourable to ſome of their doctrines and practices; yet, as interpreted by tradition, which can only give the true ſenſe of ſcripture, it agrees very well with them: I ſuppoſe they mean, that whereas a private ſpirit would be apt to underſtand ſome texts of ſcripture, as if people were to ſearch and read the ſcripture; tradition interprets thoſe texts in a quite other ſenſe, that people are not to be permitted to read the holy ſcriptures. A private ſpirit would be apt to underſtand St. *Paul*'s diſcourſe, in the xivth of the firſt to the *Corinthians* to be againſt celebrating prayer and the ſervice of God in an unknown tongue, as being contrary to edification, and indeed to common ſenſe; For he ſays, *If one ſhould come, and find them ſpeaking and praying in an unknown tongue, will they not ſay, Ye are mad?* But now tradition, which only knows how to give the true ſenſe, can reconcile this diſcourſe of St. *Paul* very eaſily with the practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter. And ſo likewiſe the epiſtle of St. *Paul* to the *Coloſſians*, with the worſhip of angels; and the epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, with offering the propitiatory ſacrifice of Chriſt in the maſs a thouſand times every day. And to give but one inſtance more: Whereas a man, by his private ſpirit, would be very apt to underſtand the ſecond commandment to forbid all worſhip of images; tradition diſcovers the meaning of this commandment to be, that *due veneration is to be given to them.* So that at this rate of interpreting ſcripture by tradition, it is impoſſible to fix any objection from ſcripture, upon any doctrine or practice which they have a mind to maintain.

Fourthly, Whereas they pretend the tradition of their church, delivered from the mouth of Chriſt, or dictated by the Holy Spirit, and brought down to them, and preſerved by continual ſucceſſion in the church, to be of equal authority with the word of God; for ſo the council of *Trent* ſays, *that the holy ſynod doth receive and venerate theſe traditions with equal pious affection and reverence as they do the written word of God:* This we muſt declare againſt, as unreaſonable in itſelf, to make tradition, conveyed by word of mouth from one to another, through ſo many ages, and liable to ſo many miſtakes and miſcarriages, to be, at the diſtance of one thouſand five hundred years, of equal certainty and authority with the holy ſcriptures, carefully preſerved and tranſmitted down to us; becauſe this (as I ſaid before) is to make common rumour and report of equal authority and certainty with a written record. And not only ſo; but hereby they make the ſcriptures an imperfect rule; contrary to the declared judgment of the ancient fathers and councils of the chriſtian church; and ſo, in truth, they ſet up *a new rule of faith*, whereby they change the chriſtian religion. For *a new rule of faith and religion*, makes *a new faith and religion*. This we charge the church of *Rome* with, and do challenge them to ſhew this *new rule of faith*, before the council of *Trent*; and conſequently where their religion was before that council; to ſhew a religion, conſiſting of all thoſe *articles* which are defined by the council of *Trent* as neceſſary to ſalvation, and eſtabliſhed upon this *new rule*, profeſſed by any chriſtian church in the world before that time. And as they have pitch'd upon *a new rule of faith*; ſo it is eaſy to ſee to what end. For take Pope *Pius* the IVth's *Creed*, and we may ſee where the *old* and *new* religion parts; even at the end of the twelve *articles* of *the Apoſtles Creed*, which was the ancient chriſtian faith; to which are added in Pope *Pius*'s *Creed*, twelve *articles* more, defined in the council of *Trent*, and ſupported only by tradition. So that as the ſcripture anſwers for the *twelve old articles*, which are plainly contained there; ſo tradition is to anſwer for the *twelve new ones*. And therefore the matter was calculated very exactly, when they make tradition juſt of *equal* authority with the ſcriptures; becauſe as many *articles* of their faith were to be made good by it, and rely upon it, as thoſe which are proved by the authority of ſcripture. But that tradition is of equal authority with the ſcriptures, we have nothing in the whole world for it, but the bare aſſertion of the council of *Trent*.

I ſhould now have added ſome other conſiderations, tending to confirm and eſtabliſh us in our religion, againſt the pretences and inſinuations of ſeducing ſpirits: But I ſhall proceed no farther at preſent.

The ſixth Sermon on this Text.

SERMON IX.

Of Conſtancy in the Profeſſion of the true Religion.

HEB. x. 23.

Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promiſed.

THESE words contain an exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, and an argument or encouragement thereto, becauſe *he is faithful that promiſed.* By the exhortation to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, is not meant, that thoſe who are capable of examining the grounds and reaſons of their religion, ſhould blindly hold it faſt againſt the beſt reaſons that can be offered; becauſe upon theſe terms, every man muſt continue in the religion in which he happens to be fixed by education, or an ill choice, be his religion true or falſe, without examining and looking into it, whether it be right or wrong; for till a man examines, every man thinks his religion right. That which the Apoſtle here exhorts Chriſtians *to hold faſt*, is *the ancient faith*, of which all Chriſtians make a ſolemn profeſſion in their baptiſm; as plainly appears from the context. And this *profeſſion of our faith*, we are *to hold* in the following inſtances, which I ſhall but briefly mention, without enlarging upon them.

1. We are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith*, againſt the confidence of men, without ſcripture or reaſon to ſupport that confidence.

2. And much more againſt the confidence of men, contrary to plain ſcripture and reaſon, and to the common ſenſe of mankind.

3. Againſt all the temptations and terrors of the world, againſt the temptations of faſhion and example, and of worldly intereſt and advantage, and againſt all terrors and ſufferings of perſecution.

4. Againſt all vain promiſes of being put into a ſafer condition, and groundleſs hopes of getting to heaven upon eaſier terms than the goſpel has propoſed, in ſome other church and religion.

Laſtly, We are to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, againſt all the cunning arts and inſinuations of buſy and diſputing men, whoſe deſign it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to make proſelytes to their party and faction.

But without entring into theſe particulars, I ſhall, in order to our eſtabliſhment in the reformed religion, which we profeſs, in oppoſition to the errors and corruptions of the church of *Rome*, apply myſelf at this time, to make a ſhort compariſon betwixt the religion which we profeſs, and that of the church of *Rome*, that we may diſcern on which ſide the advantage of truth lies; and in making this compariſon, I ſhall inſiſt upon *three* things, which will bring the matter to an iſſue, and are, I think, ſufficient to determine every ſober and conſiderate man, which of theſe he ought in reaſon, and with regard to the ſafety of his ſoul, to embrace; and they are theſe.

I. That we govern our belief and practice, in matters of religion by the true ancient rule of chriſtianity, the word of God contained in the holy ſcriptures: But the church of *Rome*, for the maintainance of their errors and corruptions, have been forced to deviſe a new rule never owned by the primitive church, nor by the ancient fathers and councils of it.

II. That the doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us and the church of *Rome*, are either contrary to this rule, or deſtitute of the warrant and authority of it, and are plain additions to the ancient Chriſtianity, and corruptions of it.

III. That our religion hath many clear advantages of that of the church of *Rome*, not only very conſiderable in themſelves, but very obvious and diſcernible to an ordinary capacity, upon the firſt propoſal of them. I ſhall be as brief in theſe as I can.

I. That we govern our belief and practice in matters of religion, by the true ancient rule of chriſtianity, the word of God contain'd in the holy ſcriptures: But the church of *Rome*, for the maintaining of their errors and corruptions, have been forced to deviſe a new rule, never owned by the primitive church, nor by the ancient councils and fathers of it; that is, they have joined with the word of God contain'd in the holy ſcriptures, the unwritten traditions of their church, concerning ſeveral points of their faith and practice, which they acknowledge cannot be proved from ſcripture, and theſe they call the unwritten word of God; and the council of *Trent* hath decreed them to be *of equal authority with the holy ſcriptures*, and that they do *receive and venerate them with the ſame pious affection and reverence*; and all this, contrary to the expreſs declaration and unanimous conſent of all the ancient councils and fathers of the chriſtian church, (as I have already ſhewn;) and this never declar'd to be a point of faith, till it was decreed, not much above a hundred years ago, in the council of *Trent*. And this ſurely, if any thing, is a matter of great conſequence, to preſume to alter the ancient rule of chriſtian doctrine and practice, and to enlarge it, and add to it at their pleaſure. But the church of *Rome* having made ſo great a change in the doctrine and practice of chriſtianity, it became conſequently neceſſary to make a change of the rule: And therefore with great reaſon did the council of *Trent* take this into conſideration in the firſt place, and put it in the front of their decrees, becauſe it was to be the foundation and main proof of the following definitions of Faith, and decrees of practice, for which, without this new rule, there had been no colour.

II. The doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us, and the church of *Rome*, are either contrary to the true rule, or deſtitute of the warrant and authority of it, and plain additions to the ancient chriſtianity, and corruptions of it. The truth of this will beſt appear, by inſtancing in ſome of the principal doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us.

As for their two great fundamental doctrines, of the ſupremacy of the biſhop of *Rome* over all the Chriſtians in the world, and the infallibility of their church, there is not one word in ſcripture concerning theſe privileges; nay, it is little leſs than a demonſtration that they have no ſuch privileges, that St. *Paul* in a long epiſtle to the church of *Rome* takes no notice of them, that the church of *Rome* either then was, or was to be ſoon after, the mother and miſtreſs of all churches, which is now grown to be an article of faith, in the church of *Rome*; and yet it is hardly to be imagined, that he could have omitted to take notice of ſuch remarkable privileges of their biſhops and church, above all in the world, had he known they had belonged to them. So that in all probability he was ignorant of thoſe mighty prerogatives of the church of *Rome*; otherwiſe it cannot be, but that he would have written with more deference and ſubmiſſion to this ſeat of infallibility, and center of unity; he would certainly have paid a greater reſpect to this mother and miſtreſs of all churches, where the head of the church, and vicar of Chriſt, either was already ſeated, or by the appointment of Chriſt was deſigned for ever to fix his throne and eſtabliſh his reſidence; but there is not one word, or the leaſt intimation of any ſuch thing throughout this whole epiſtle, nor in any other part of the new teſtament.

Beſides that both theſe pretended privileges are omitted, by plain fact and evidence of things themſelves; their *ſupremacy*, in that the far greateſt part of the chriſtian church, neither is at this day, nor can be ſhewn by the records of any age, ever to have been ſubject to the biſhop of *Rome*, or to have acknowledged his authority and juriſdiction over them: And the *infallibility* of the Pope, whether with or without a general council, about which they ſtill differ, though infallibility was deviſed on purpoſe to determine all differences; I ſay, this *infallibility*, where-ever it is pretended to be, is plainly confuted by the contradictory definitions of ſeveral Popes and councils; for if they have contradicted one another, as is plain, beyond all contradiction, in ſeveral inſtances, then there muſt of neceſſity be an error on one ſide; and there can be no ſo certain demonſtration, that any one is infallible, as evident error and miſtake is of the contrary.

Next, their concealing both the rule of religion, and the practice of it in the worſhip and ſervice of God, from the people, in an unknown tongue; and their adminiſtring the communion to the people in one kind only, contrary to clear ſcripture, and the plain inſtitution of our bleſſed Saviour. And then their worſhip of images, and invocation of Angels and ſaints, and the bleſſed Virgin, in the ſame ſolemn manner, and for the ſame bleſſings and benefits which we beg of God himſelf; contrary to the expreſs word of God, which commands us *to worſhip the Lord our God, and to ſerve him only*; and which declares, that as there is but *one God*, ſo there is but *one mediator between God and man, Chriſt Jeſus*; but *one mediator*, not only of *redemption*, but of *interceſſion* too; for the Apoſtle there ſpeaks of *a mediator of interceſſion*, by whom only we are to offer up our prayers, which are to be put up to God only; and which expreſly forbids men to worſhip any image or likeneſs. And the learned men of their own church acknowledge, that there is neither precept nor example for theſe practices in ſcripture, and that they were not uſed in the chriſtian church for ſeveral ages; and this acknowledgment we think very conſiderable, ſince ſo great a part of their religion, eſpecially as it is practiſed among the people, is contained in theſe points. For the ſervice of God in an unknown tongue, and withholding the ſcriptures from the people, they do not pretend ſo much as one teſtimony of any father for the firſt ſix hundred years, and nothing certainly can be more unreaſonable in itſelf, than to deny people the beſt means of knowing the will of God, and not to permit them to underſtand what is done in the publick worſhip of God, and what prayers are put up to him in the church.

The two great doctrines of *tranſubſtantiation* and *purgatory* are acknowledged by many of their own learned writers, to have no certain foundation in ſcripture: And that there are *ſeven ſacraments* of the chriſtian religion, tho' it be now made an article of faith by the council of *Trent*, is a thing which cannot be ſhewn in any council or father for above a thouſand years after Chriſt. And we find no mention of this number of the ſacraments, till the age of *Peter Lombard* the father of the ſchoolmen.

That the church of *Rome is the mother and miſtreſs of all churches*, tho' that alſo be one of the new articles of Pope *Pius* IV. his Creed, which their prieſts are by a ſolemn oath obliged to believe and teach; and yet it is moſt evidently falſe. That ſhe is not the mother of all churches is plain, becauſe *Jeruſalem* was certainly ſo; for *there* certainly was the firſt chriſtian church, and from thence all the chriſtian churches in the world derive themſelves: That ſhe is not, (tho' ſhe fain would be) the miſtreſs of all churches, is as evident, becauſe the greateſt part of the chriſtian church does at this day, and always did deny that ſhe hath any authority or ſupremacy over them. Now theſe are the principal matters in difference betwixt us; and if theſe points, and a few more, be pared off from *Popery*, that which remains of their religion, is the ſame with ours, that is, the true ancient chriſtianity.

III. I ſhall ſhew that our religion hath many clear advantages of theirs, not only very conſiderable in themſelves, but very obvious and diſcernible to an ordinary capacity, upon the very firſt propoſal of them; as,

1. That our religion agrees perfectly with the ſcriptures, and all points both of our belief and practice, eſteemed by us as neceſſary to ſalvation, are there contained, even our enemies themſelves being judges. We *worſhip the Lord our God, and him only* do we *ſerve*. We do not fall down before images and worſhip them: We addreſs all our prayers to God alone, by the only mediation and interceſſion of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, as he himſelf hath given us commandment, and as St. *Paul* doth plainly direct, giving us this plain and ſubſtantial reaſon for it, becauſe as there is but *one God*, ſo there is but *one mediator between God and man, the man Chriſt Jeſus*.

The publick worſhip and ſervice of God is perform'd by us in a language which we underſtand, according to St. *Paul*'s expreſs order and direction, and the univerſal practice of the ancient church, and the nature and reaſon of the thing itſelf. We adminiſter the ſacrament of the Lord's Supper in both kinds, according to our Saviour's example and plain inſtitution, and the continual practice of all the chriſtian churches in the world, for above a thouſand years.

2. We believe nothing as neceſſary to ſalvation, but what hath been owned in all ages to be the chriſtian doctrine, and is acknowledged ſo to be by the church of *Rome* itſelf; and

we receive the whole faith of the primitive chriſtian church, *viz.* whatever is contained in the Apoſtles Creed, and in the explications of that in the Creeds of the four firſt general councils. By which it plainly appears, that all the points of faith in difference betwixt us and the church of *Rome* are mere innovations and plain additions to the ancient chriſtian faith: But all that we believe, is acknowledged by them to be undoubtedly the ancient chriſtian faith.

3. There is nothing wanting in our church and religion, whether in matter of faith or practice, which either the ſcripture makes neceſſary to ſalvation, or was ſo eſteem'd by the chriſtian church for the firſt five hundred years; and we truſt, that what was ſufficient for the ſalvation of Chriſtians in the beſt ages of chriſtianity, for five hundred years together, may be ſo ſtill; and we are very well content to venture our ſalvation upon the ſame terms that they did.

4. Our religion is not only free from all idolatrous worſhip, but even from all ſuſpicion and probable charge of any ſuch thing: but this the church of *Rome* is not, as is acknowledged by her moſt learned champions, and as no man of ingenuity can deny; and the reaſon which the learned men give, why the worſhip of images and the invocation of Angels and ſaints departed were not practiſed in the primitive church for the firſt three hundred years, is a plain acknowledgment that theſe practices are very liable to the ſuſpicion of idolatry: for they ſay, that the Chriſtians did then forbear thoſe practices becauſe they ſeem'd to come too near to the Pagan idolatry, and leſt the heathen ſhould have taken occaſion to have juſtified themſelves, if theſe things had been practiſed among Chriſtians; and they cannot now be ignorant, what ſcandal they give by theſe practices both to the *Jews* and *Turks*, and how much they alienate them from chriſtianity by this ſcandal; nor can they chooſe but be ſenſible, upon how great diſadvantage they are in defending theſe practices from the charge of idolatry, and that by all their blind diſtinctions, with which they raiſe ſuch a cloud and duſt, they can hardly make any plauſible and tolerable defence of themſelves from this charge; inſomuch, that to ſecure their own people from diſcerning their guilt in this matter, they have been put upon that ſhameful ſhift of leaving out the ſecond commandment in their common catechiſms and manuals, leſt the people ſeeing ſo plain a law of God againſt ſo common a practice of their church, ſhould upon that diſcovery have broken off from them.

5. Nor is our religion incumber'd with ſuch an endleſs number of ſuperſtitious and troubleſome obſervances, as theirs infinitely is, even beyond the number of the *Jewiſh* ceremonies, to the great burden and ſcandal of the chriſtian religon, and the diverting of mens minds from the ſpiritual part of religion, and the more weighty and neceſſary duties of the chriſtian life; ſo that, in truth, a devout paſtor is ſo taken up with the external rites and little obſervances of his religion, that he hath little or no time to make himſelf a good man, and to cultivate and improve his mind in true piety and virtue.

6. Our religion is evidently more charitable to all chriſtians that differ from us, and particularly to them, who by their uncharitableneſs to us, have done as much as is poſſible to diſcharge and damp our charity towards them. And charity, as it is one of the moſt eſſential marks of a true Chriſtian, ſo it is likewiſe the beſt mark and ornament of a true church; and of all things that can be thought of, methinks the want of charity in any church ſhould be a motive to no man to fall in love with it, and to be fond of its communion.

7. Our religion doth not claſh and interfere with any of the great moral duties to which all mankind ſtand obliged by the law and light of nature; as fidelity, mercy and truth. We do not teach men to break faith with hereticks or infidels; nor to deſtroy and extirpate thoſe who differ from us, with fire and ſword: No ſuch thing as equivocation or mental reſervation, or any other artificial way of falſhood, is either taught or maintain'd, either by the doctrine, or by the caſuiſts of our church.

8. Our religion and all the doctrines of it are perfectly conſiſtent with the peace of civil government, and the welfare of human ſociety. We neither exempt the clergy from ſubjection to the civil powers; nor abſolve ſubjects upon any pretence whatſoever from allegiance to their Princes; both which points, the neceſſity of the one, and the lawfulneſs of the other, have been taught and ſtiffly maintain'd in the church of *Rome*, not only by private doctors, but by Popes and general Councils.

9. The doctrines of our religion, are perfectly free from all ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign; whereas the greateſt part of the erroneous doctrines with which we charge the church of *Rome*, are plainly calculated to promote the end of worldly greatneſs and dominion.

The Pope's *kingdom is plainly of this world*; and the doctrines and maxims of it, like ſo many *ſervants*, are *ready* upon all occaſions *to fight for him*. For moſt of them do plainly tend, either to the eſtabliſhment and enlargement of his authority; or to the magnifying of the prieſts, and the giving them a perfect power over the conſciences of the people, and the keeping them in a ſlaviſh ſubjection and blind obedience to them. And to this purpoſe do plainly tend the doctrines of exempting the clergy from the ſecular power and juriſdiction, the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation; for it muſt needs make the prieſt a great man in the opinion of the people, to believe that he can make God, as they love to expreſs it, without all reaſon and reverence. Of the like tendency is the communicating of the laity only in one kind, thereby making it the ſole privilege of the prieſt to receive the ſacrament in both: The withholding the ſcripture from the people, and celebrating the ſervice of God in an unknown tongue: The doctrine of an implicit faith, and abſolute reſignation of their judgments to their teachers: Theſe do all directly tend to keep the people in ignorance, and to bring them to a blind obedience to the dictates of their teachers. So likewiſe the neceſſity of the intention of the prieſt, to the ſaving virtue and efficacy of the ſacraments; by which doctrine, the people do upon the matter depend as much upon the good-will of the prieſt, as upon the mercy of God for their ſalvation. But above all, their doctrine of the neceſſity of auricular and private confeſſion of all mortal ſins committed after baptiſm, with all the circumſtances of them to the prieſt; and this not only for the eaſe and direction of their conſciences, but as a neceſſary condition of having their ſins pardoned and forgiven by God; by which means they make themſelves maſters of all the ſecrets of the people, and keep them in awe by the knowledge of their faults, *Scire volunt ſecreta domûs atque inde timeri*. Or elſe their doctrines tend to filthy lucre, and the enriching of their church: As their doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, and their prayers and maſſes for the dead; and many more doctrines and practices of the like kind plainly do.

10. Our religion is free from all diſingenuous and diſhoneſt arts of maintaining and ſupporting itſelf. Such are clipping of ancient authors, nay, and even the authors and writers of their own church, when they ſpeak too freely of any point; as may be ſeen in their *indices expurgatorii*, which much againſt their wills have been brought to light. To which I ſhall only add theſe three groſs forgeries, which lie all at their doors, and they cannot deny them to be ſo.

1. The pretended *canon* of the council of *Nice* in the caſe of appeals, between the church of *Rome* and the *African* church; upon which they inſiſted a great while very confidently, till at laſt they were convinced by authentick copies of the canons of that council.

2. *Conſtantine*'s donation to the Pope, which they kept a great ſtir with, till the forgery of it was diſcovered.

3. The decretal epiſtles of the ancient Popes; a large volume of forgeries compiled by *Iſidore Mercator*, to countenance the uſurpations of the biſhop of *Rome*, and of which the church of *Rome* made great uſe for ſeveral ages, and pertinaciouſly defended the authority of them, till the learned men of their own church have at laſt been forced for very ſhame to diſclaim them, and to confeſs the impoſture of them. A like inſtance whereto is not I hope to be ſhewn in any chriſtian church. This is that which St. *Paul* calls κυβεία, *the ſleight of men*, ſuch as gameſters uſe at dice; for to alledge falſe and forged authors in this caſe, is to play with falſe dice, when the ſalvation of mens ſouls lies at ſtake.

11. Our religion has this mighty advantage. That it doth not decline trial and examination, which to any man of ingenuity muſt needs appear a very good ſign of an honeſt cauſe; but if any church be ſhy of having her religion examined, and her doctrines and practices brought into the open light, this gives juſt ground of ſuſpicion that ſhe hath ſome diſtruſt of them; for truth doth not ſeek corners, nor ſhun the light. Our Saviour hath told us who they are that *love darkneſs rather than light*, viz. *they* whoſe *deeds are evil*; *for every one*, ſaith he, *that doth evil, hateth the light*; *neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved and made manifeſt*. There needs no more to render a religion ſuſpected to a wiſe man, than to ſee thoſe who profeſs it, and make ſuch proud boaſts of the truth and goodneſs of it, ſo fearful that it ſhould be examin'd and look'd into, and that their people ſhould take the liberty to hear and read what can be ſaid againſt it.

12. We perſuade men to our religion by human and chriſtian ways, ſuch as our Saviour and his Apoſtles uſed, by urging men with the authority of God, and with arguments fetch'd from another world, the promiſe of eternal life and happineſs, and the threatning of eternal death and miſery, which are the proper arguments of religion, and which alone are fitted to work upon the minds and conſciences of men. The terror and torture of death may make men hypocrites, and awe them to profeſs with their mouths what they do not believe in their hearts; but this is no proper means of converting the ſoul, and convincing the minds and conſciences of men; and theſe violent and cruel ways cannot be denied to have been practiſed in the church of *Rome*, and ſet on foot by the authority of councils, and greatly countenanced and encouraged by Popes themſelves; witneſs the many croiſades for the extirpation of hereticks, the ſtanding cruelties of their inquiſition, their occaſional maſſacres and perſecutions, of which we have freſh inſtances in every age.

But theſe methods of converſion are a certain ſign that they either diſtruſt the truth and goodneſs of their cauſe, or elſe that they think truth and the arguments for it are of no force, when dragoons are their *ratio ultima*, the laſt reaſon which their cauſe relies upon, and the beſt and moſt effectual it can afford.

Again, we hold no doctrines in defiance of the ſenſes of all mankind; ſuch as is that of tranſubſtantiation, which is now declared in the church of *Rome* to be a neceſſary article of faith, ſo that a man cannot be of that religion, unleſs he will renounce his ſenſes, and believe againſt the clear verdict of them in a plain ſenſible matter: But after this, I do not underſtand how a man can believe any thing, becauſe by this very thing he deſtroys and takes away the foundation of all certainty. If any man forbid me to believe what I ſee, I forbid him to believe any thing upon better and ſurer evidence. St. *Paul* ſaith, that *faith cometh by hearing*; but if I cannot rely upon the certainty of ſenſe, then the means whereby faith is conveyed is uncertain; and we may ſay as St. *Paul* doth in another caſe, *then is our preaching vain, and your faith is alſo vain.*

Laſtly, (to mention no more particulars) as to ſeveral things uſed and practiſed in the church of *Rome*, we are on much the ſafer ſide, if we ſhould happen to be miſtaken about them, than they are, if they ſhould be miſtaken; for it is certainly lawful to read the ſcriptures, and lawful to permit to the people the uſe of the ſcriptures in a known tongue; otherwiſe we muſt condemn the Apoſtles and the primitive church for allowing this liberty. It is certainly lawful to have the publick prayers and ſervice of God celebrated in a language which all that join in it can underſtand. It is certainly lawful to adminiſter the ſacrament of the Lord's Supper, to the people in both kinds; otherwiſe the chriſtian church would not have done it for a thouſand years. It is certainly lawful not to worſhip images, not to pray to angels, or ſaints, or the bleſſed Virgin; otherwiſe the primitive church would not have forborn theſe practices for three hundred years, as is acknowledged by thoſe of the church of *Rome*.

Suppoſe a man ſhould pray to God only, and offer up all his prayers to him only by Jeſus Chriſt, without making mention of any other mediator or interceſſor with God for us, relying herein upon what the Apoſtle ſays concerning our *High-Prieſt*, *Jeſus the Son of God*, Heb. vii. 25. *That he is able to ſave them to the uttermoſt, who come unto God by him*, *i. e.* by his mediation and interceſſion, *ſince he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them*; might not a man reaſonably hope to obtain of God all the bleſſings he ſtands in need of by addreſſing himſelf only to him, in the name and by the interceſſion of that *one mediator between God and man, the man Chriſt Jeſus?* Nay, why may not a man reaſonably think that this is both a ſhorter and more effectual way to obtain our requeſts, than by turning ourſelves to the angels and ſaints, and importuning them to ſolicit God for us; eſpecially if we ſhould order the matter ſo, as to make ten times more frequent addreſſes to theſe, than we do to God and our bleſſed Saviour; and, in compariſon of the other, to neglect theſe. We cannot certainly think any more able to help us and do us good, than the great God of heaven and earth,, *the God* (as the Pſalmiſt ſtiles him) *that heareth prayers*, and therefore *unto him ſhould all fleſh come.* We cannot certainly think any interceſſor ſo powerful and prevalent with God, as his only and dearly beloved Son, offering up our prayers to God in heaven, by virtue of that moſt acceptable and invaluable ſacrifice, which he offered to him on earth. We cannot ſurely think, that there is ſo much goodneſs any where as in God; that in any of the angels or ſaints, or even in the bleſſed mother of our Lord, there is more mercy and compaſſion for ſinners, and a tenderer ſenſe of our infirmities, than in the

Son of God, *who is at the right hand of his Father, to appear in the preſence of God for us.* We are ſure that God always hears the petitions which we put up to him; and ſo does the Son of God, by whom we put them up to the Father, becauſe he alſo is *God bleſſed for evermore.* But we are not ſure that the angels and ſaints hear our prayers, becauſe we are ſure that they are neither omniſcient nor omnipreſent; and we are not ſure, nor probably certain, that our prayers are made known to them any other way, there being no revelation of God, to that purpoſe. We are ſure that God hath declared himſelf to be a *jealous God*, and that *he will not give his honour to another*; and we are not ſure but that prayer is part of the honour which is due to God alone; and if it were not, we can hardly think but that God ſhould be ſo far from being pleaſed with our making ſo frequent uſe of thoſe other mediators and interceſſors, and from granting our deſires the ſooner upon that account; that, on the contrary, we have reaſon to think he ſhould be highly offended, when he himſelf is ready to receive all our petitions, and hath appointed a great mediator to that purpoſe, to ſee more addreſſes made to, and by the angels and ſaints, and bleſſed Virgin, than to himſelf by his bleſſed Son: and to ſee the worſhip of himſelf almoſt juſtled out, by the devotion of people to ſaints and angels, and the bleſſed mother of our Lord; a thing which he *never commanded*, and which, ſo far as appears by ſcripture, *never came into his mind.* I have been the longer upon this matter, to ſhew how unreaſonable and needleſs at the beſt, this more than half part of the religion of the church of *Rome* is; and how ſafely it may be let alone.

But now, on the other hand, if they be miſtaken in theſe things, as we can demonſtrate from ſcripture they are, the danger is infinitely great on that ſide; for then they oppoſe an inſtitution of Chriſt, who appointed the ſacrament to be received in both kinds; and they involve themſelves in a great danger of the guilt of idolatry, and our common chriſtianity in the ſcandal and reproach of it; and this without any neceſſity, ſince *God hath required none of theſe things at our hands*; and, after all the buſtle which hath been made about them, the utmoſt they pretend (which yet they are not able to make good) is, that theſe things may lawfully be done; and at the ſame time they cannot deny, but that if the church had not enjoined them, they might lawfully be let alone. And can any thing be more unreaſonable, than ſo pertinaciouſly to inſiſt upon things ſo hard, I may ſay impoſſible, to be defended or excuſed, and which by their own acknowledgment, are of no great weight and neceſſity; in which we are certainly ſafe in not doing them, if they ſhould prove lawful; but if they do not prove ſo, they are in a moſt dangerous condition. So that here is certain ſafety on the one hand, and the danger of damnation on the other; which is as great odds as is poſſible.

And they muſt not tell us that they are in no danger, becauſe they are infallible, and cannot be miſtaken; they muſt prove that point a great deal better than they have yet done, before it can ſignify any thing either to our ſatisfaction or their ſafety.

I might have inſiſted more largely upon each of theſe particulars, any one of which is of weight to incline a man to that religion, which hath ſuch an advantage on its ſide; but all of them together make ſo powerful an argument to an unprejudiced perſon, as muſt almoſt irreſiſtibly determine his choice; for moſt of the particulars are ſo evident, that they cannot, upon the very mention and propoſal of them, be denied to be clear advantages on our ſide.

And now, to uſe the words of St. *Peter*, *I teſtify unto you that this is the true grace of God wherein you ſtand*, that the reformed religion which we profeſs, and which by the goodneſs of God is by law eſtabliſhed in this nation, is the true ancient chriſtianity, *the faith* which was *at firſt delivered to the ſaints*, and which is conveyed down to us in the writings of the Apoſtles and the Evangeliſts of our Lord and Saviour. *Remember therefore how ye have received and heard*; *and hold faſt*; *for he is faithful that* hath *promiſed*; which is the *ſecond* part of the *text:* The encouragement which the Apoſtle gives us *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, he is faithful that* hath *promiſed* to give us *his Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, to eſtabliſh, ſtrengthen, and ſettle us* in the profeſſion of it, to ſupport and comfort us under all trials and temptations, *and to ſeal us up to the day of redemption*; *and he is faithful that* hath *promiſed* to reward our conſtancy and fidelity to him and his truth, with *a crown of everlaſting life and glory. Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt and unmoveable,* and *always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as you know that your labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord*;

for he is faithful that hath *promiſed*, and *let us provoke one another to charity and good works, which are the* great ornament and glory of any religion, and *ſo much the more becauſe the day approacheth in which God will judge* the belief and lives of *men*, *by Jeſus Chriſt*; not according to the imperious and uncharitable dictates of any church, but *according to the Goſpel of his Son, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory now and for ever.*

Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead the great ſhepherd of the ſheep through the blood of the everlaſting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, working in you that which is pleaſing in his ſight. And *the peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.*

SERMON X.

The Chriſtian Life, a Life of Faith.

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2 Cor. v. 7.

For we walk by Faith, not by Sight.

IN the latter part of the former chapter, the Apoſtle declares what it was that was the great ſupport of Chriſtians under the perſecutions and ſufferings which befel them, *viz.* the aſſurance of a bleſſed reſurrection to another life, ver. 14: *Knowing that he which raiſed up the Lord Jeſus, ſhall raiſe up us alſo by Jeſus*; *for which cauſe*, ſaith he, ver. 16. *we faint not*; *but though our outward man periſh, our inward man is renewed day by day*; that is, though our bodies, by reaſon of the hardſhips and ſufferings which we undergo, are continually decaying and declining; yet our minds grow every day more healthful and vigorous, and gain new ſtrength and reſolution, by contemplating the glory and reward of another world, and as it were feeding upon them by faith; *for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen.*

And he reſumes the ſame argument again at the beginning of this chapter; *For we know, that if our earthly houſe of this tabernacle were diſſolved, we have a building of God, a houſe not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens*; that is, we are firmly perſuaded, that when we die, we ſhall but exchange theſe earthly and periſhing bodies, theſe houſes of clay, for a heavenly manſion, which will never decay nor come to ruin: From whence he concludes, ver. 6. *Therefore we are always confident*, θαῤῥοῦντες οὖν πάντοτε, therefore whatever happens to us, we are always of good courage, and ſee no reaſon to be afraid of death; *knowing that whilſt we are at home in the body, we are abſent from the Lord*; that is, ſince our continuance in the body is to our diſadvantage, and while we live, we are abſent from our happineſs, and when we die we ſhall then enter upon the poſſeſſion of it. That which gives us this confidence and good courage, is our faith; for though we be not actually poſſeſs'd of this happineſs which we ſpeak of, yet we have a firm perſuaſion of the reality of it, which is enough to ſupport our ſpirits, and keep up our courage under all afflictions and adverſities whatſoever, ver. 7. *For we walk by faith, not by ſight.*

Theſe words come in by way of *Parentheſis*, in which the Apoſtle declares in general, what is the ſwaying and governing principle of a chriſtian life; not only in caſe of perſecution and affliction, but under all events, and in every condition of human life; and that is faith, in oppoſition to ſight and preſent enjoyment: *We walk by faith*, and *not by ſight. We walk by faith:* Whatever principle ſways and governs a man's life and actions, he is ſaid to walk and live by it. And as here a Chriſtian is ſaid to *walk by faith*, ſo elſewhere *the juſt* is ſaid to *live by faith*. Faith is the principle which animates all his reſolutions and actions.

And *not by ſight.* The word is εἶδος, which ſignifies the thing itſelf in preſent view and poſſeſſion, in oppoſition to a firm perſuaſion of things future and inviſible. Sight is the thing in hand, and faith the thing only in hope and expectation. Sight is a clear view and apprehenſion of things preſent and near to us, faith an obſcure diſcovery and apprehenſion of things at a diſtance: So the Apoſtle tells us, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 12. *Now we ſee through a glaſs darkly*; this is faith; *but then face to face*, this is preſent ſight, as one man ſees another face to face; and thus likewiſe the ſame Apoſtle diſtinguiſheth betwixt hope and ſight, *Rom.* viii. 24, 25. *Hope that is ſeen is not hope*; *for what a man ſees, why doth he yet hope for it? but if we hope for that which we ſee not, then do we with patience wait for it.* Sight is poſſeſſion and enjoyment; faith is the firm perſuaſion and expectation of a thing; and this the Apoſtle tells us was the governing principle of a Chriſtian's life; *For we walk by faith, and not by ſight*; from which words I ſhall obſerve theſe three things.

I. That faith is the governing principle, and that which bears the great ſway in the life and actions of a Chriſtian; *we walk by faith*; that is we order and govern our lives in the power and virtue of this principle.

II. Faith is a degree of aſſent inferior to that of ſenſe. This is ſufficiently intimated in the oppoſition betwixt faith and ſight. He had ſaid before, that *whilſt we are at home in the body, we are abſent from the Lord*; and gives this as a reaſon and proof of our abſence from the Lord, *for we walk by faith, and not by ſight*; that is, whilſt we are in the body, we do not ſee and enjoy, but believe and expect; if we were preſent with the Lord, then faith would ceaſe, and be turned into ſight; but tho' we have not that aſſurance of another world, which we ſhall have when we come to ſee and enjoy theſe things, yet we are firmly perſuaded of them.

III. Notwithſtanding faith be an inferior degree of aſſurance, yet 'tis a principle of ſufficient power to govern our lives; *we walk by faith*; it is ſuch an aſſurance as hath an influence upon our lives.

I. That faith is the governing principle, and that which bears the great ſway in the life and actions of a Chriſtian. *We walk by faith*; that is, we order and govern our lives in the power and virtue of this principle. A Chriſtian's life conſiſts in obedience to the will of God; that is, in a readineſs to do what he commands, and in a willingneſs to ſuffer what he calls us to; and the great arguments and encouragements hereto, are ſuch things, as are the objects of faith and not of ſenſe; ſuch things as are abſent and future, and not preſent, and in poſſeſſion. For inſtance, the belief of an inviſible God, of a ſecret power and providence, that orders and governs all things, that can bleſs or blaſt us, and all our deſigns and undertakings, according as we demean ourſelves towards him, and endeavour to approve ourſelves to him; the perſuaſion of a ſecret aid and influence always ready at hand to keep us from evil, and to ſtrengthen and aſſiſt us to that which is good; more eſpecially the firm belief, and expectation of the happineſs of heaven, and the glorious rewards of another world, which tho' they be now at a diſtance, and inviſible to us, yet being grounded upon the promiſe of *God that cannot lye*, ſhall certainly be made good.

And this faith, this firm perſuaſion of abſent and inviſible things, the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us, was the great principle of the piety and virtue of good men from the beginning of the world. This he calls, *Chap.* xi. *ver.* 1. the ὑπόστασις, or *the confident expectation of things hoped for, and the proof or evidence of things not ſeen, viz.* a firm perſuaſion of the being and providence of God, and of the truth and faithfulneſs of his promiſes. Such was the faith of *Abel*, he believed *that there was a God, and that he was a rewarder of thoſe that faithfully ſerve him.* Such was the faith of *Noah*, who being warned of God, of things at a great diſtance, and not ſeen as yet, notwithſtanding believed the divine prediction concerning the flood, and prepared an ark. Such alſo was the faith of *Abraham*, concerning a numerous poſterity by *Iſaac*, and the inheritance of the land of *Canaan*; and ſuch likewiſe was the faith of *Moſes*, he did as firmly believe the inviſible God, and the recompenſe of reward, as if he had beheld them with his eyes.

And of this recompenſe of reward, we Chriſtians have a much clearer revelation, and much greater aſſurance, than former ages and generations had; and the firm belief and perſuaſion of this, is the great motive and argument to a holy life; *The hope which is ſet before us* of obtaining the happineſs, and the fear of incurring the miſery of another world. This made the primitive Chriſtians, with ſo much patience to bear the ſufferings and perſecutions, with ſo much conſtancy to venture upon the dangers and inconveniencies which the love of God and religion expoſed them to.

Under the former diſpenſation of the law, tho' good men received good hopes of the rewards of another life, yet theſe things were but obſcurely revealed to them, and the great inducements to obedience were temporal rewards and puniſhments, the promiſes of long life, and peace, and plenty, and proſperity, in that good land which God had given them, and the threatnings of war, and famine, and peſtilence, and being delivered into captivity. But now under *the Goſpel, life and immortality are brought to light*; and the great arguments that bear ſway with Chriſtians, are the promiſes of everlaſting life, and the threatnings of eternal miſery; and the firm belief and perſuaſion of theſe is now the great principle that governs the lives and actions of good men: For what will not men do, that are really perſuaded, that as they do demean themſelves in this world, it will fare with them in the other? That *the wicked ſhall go into everlaſting puniſhment, and the righteous into life eternal.* I proceed to the

IId Obſervation, namely, that faith is a degree of aſſent, inferior to that of ſenſe. This is intimated in the oppoſition betwixt faith and ſight; *We walk by faith,* and *not by ſight*; that is, we believe theſe things, and are confidently perſuaded of the truth of them, tho' we never ſaw them, and conſequently cannot poſſibly have that degree of aſſurance concerning the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell, which thoſe have who enjoy the one and endure the other.

There are different degrees of aſſurance concerning things, ariſing from the different degrees of evidence we have for them. The higheſt degree of evidence we have for any thing is our own ſenſe and experience; and this is ſo firm and ſtrong, that it is not to be ſhaken by the utmoſt pretence of a rational demonſtration; men will truſt their own ſenſes and experience, againſt any ſubtilty of reaſon whatſoever: But there are inferior degrees of aſſurance concerning things, as the teſtimony and authority of perſons every way credible: And this aſſurance we have in this ſtate concerning the things of another world, we believe with great reaſon, that we have the teſtimony of God concerning them, which is the higheſt kind of evidence in itſelf; and we have all the reaſonable aſſurance we can deſire that God hath teſtified theſe things, and this is the utmoſt aſſurance which things future, and at a diſtance are capable of.

But yet it is an unreaſonable obſtinacy to deny, that this falls very much ſhort of that degree of aſſurance which thoſe perſons have concerning theſe things, who are now in the other world, and have the ſenſe and experience of theſe things. And this is not only intimated here in the text, in oppoſition of faith and ſight, but is plainly expreſt in other texts of ſcripture; 1 *Cor.* xiii. 9, 10. *We know now but in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part ſhall be done away.* That degree of knowledge and aſſurance which we have in this life is very imperfect, in compariſon to what we ſhall have hereafter; and ver. 12. *We now ſee, as through a glaſs darkly,* ἐν αἰνίγματι, *as in a riddle,* in which there is always a great deal of obſcurity; all which expreſſions are certainly intended by way of abatement and diminution to the certainty of faith; becauſe it is plain, that by *that which is in any part, or imperfect,* the Apoſtle means faith and hope, which he tells us ſhall ceaſe, when *that which is perfect,* meaning viſion and ſight, is come. We ſee likewiſe in experience, that the faith and hope of the beſt Chriſtians in this life is accompanied with doubting concerning theſe things, and all doubting is a degree of uncertainty; but thoſe bleſſed ſouls who are enter'd upon the poſſeſſion of glory and happineſs, and thoſe miſerable wretches who lie groaning under the wrath of God and the ſeverity of his juſtice, cannot poſſibly, if they would, have any doubt concerning the truth and reality of theſe things.

But however contentious men may diſpute againſt common ſenſe, this is ſo plain a truth, that I will not labour in the farther proof of it; nor indeed is it reaſonable, while we are in this ſtate, to expect that degree of aſſurance concerning the rewards and puniſhments of another life, which the ſight and ſenſible experience of them would give us; and that upon theſe two accounts;

1. Becauſe our preſent ſtate will not admit it; and,
2. If it would, it is not reaſonable we ſhould have it.

1. Our preſent ſtate will not admit it. For while we are in this world, it is not poſſible we ſhould have that ſenſible experiment and trial how things are in the other. The things of the other world are remote from us, and far out of our ſight, and we cannot have any experimental knowledge of them, till we ourſelves enter into that ſtate. Thoſe who are already paſt into it know how things are; thoſe happy ſouls who live in the reviving preſence of God, and are poſſeſt of thoſe joys which we cannot now conceive, underſtand

theſe things in another manner, and have a more perfect aſſurance concerning them, than it is poſſible for any man to have in this world, and thoſe wretched and miſerable ſpirits who feel the vengeance of God, and are plunged into the horrors of eternal darkneſs, do believe upon irreſiſtible evidence, and have other kind of convictions of the reality of that ſtate, and the inſupportable miſery of it, than any man is capable of in this world.

2. If our preſent ſtate would admit of this high degree of aſſurance, it is not fit and reaſonable that we ſhould have it. Such an overpowering evidence would quite take away the virtue of faith, and much leſſen that of obedience. Put the caſe that every man, ſome conſiderable time before his departure out of this life, were permitted to viſit the other world, to aſſure him how things are there, to view the manſions of the bleſſed, and to ſurvey the dark and loathſome priſons of the damned, to hear the lamentable outcries of miſerable and deſpairing ſouls, and to ſee the inconceivable anguiſh and torments they are in; after this, what virtue would it be in any man to believe theſe things? he that had been there and ſeen them, could not disbelieve them if he would. Faith in this caſe would not be virtue, but neceſſity, and therefore it is obſervable, that our Saviour doth not pronounce them bleſſed, who believed his reſurrection, upon the forcible evidence of their own ſenſes, *but bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.* They might be happy in the effects of that faith, but there is no praiſe, no reward belongs to that faith which is wrought in man by ſo violent and irreſiſtible an evidence. It was the great commendation of *Abraham*'s faith, that *againſt hope he believed in hope*, he believed the promiſe of God concerning a thing in itſelf very improbable: But it is no commendation at all to believe the things which we have ſeen, becauſe they admit of no manner of diſpute; no objection can be offered to ſhake our aſſent, unleſs we will run to the extremity of ſcepticiſm; for if we will believe any thing at all, we muſt yield to the evidence of ſenſe. This does ſo violently enforce our aſſent, that there can be no virtue in ſuch a faith.

And as this would take away the virtue of faith, ſo it would very much leſſen that of our obedience. It is hardly to be imagined, that any man who had ſeen the bleſſed condition of good men in another world, and been an eye-witneſs of the intolerable torments of ſinners, ſhould ever after be tempted knowingly to do any thing that would deprive him of that happineſs, or bring him *into that place of torment.* Such a ſight could not chooſe but affect a man as long as he lived; and leave ſuch impreſſions upon his mind, of the indiſpenſable neceſſity of a holy life, and of the infinite danger of a wicked courſe, that we might ſooner believe that all the men in the world ſhould conſpire to kill one another, than that ſuch a man, by conſenting to any deliberate act of ſin ſhould wilfully throw himſelf into thoſe flames: No, his mind would be continually haunted with thoſe furies he had ſeen tormenting ſinners in another world, and the fearful ſhrieks and outcries of miſerable ſouls would be perpetually ringing in his ears; and the man would have ſo lively and terrible an imagination of the danger he was running himſelf upon, that no temptation would be ſtrong enough to conquer his fears, and to make him careleſs of his life and actions, after he had once ſeen how *fearful a thing it was to fall into the hands of the living God:* So that in this caſe, the reaſon of mens obedience would be ſo violent, that the virtue of it muſt be very little; for what praiſe is due to any man, not to do thoſe things which none but a perfect mad man would do? for certainly that man muſt be beſides himſelf, that could by any temptation be ſeduced to live a wicked life, after he had ſeen the ſtate of good and bad men in the other world; the glorious rewards of holineſs and virtue, and the diſmal event of a vicious and ſinful courſe. God hath deſigned this life for the trial of our virtue, and the exerciſe of our obedience; but there would hardly be any place for this, if there were a free and eaſy paſſage for us into the other world, to ſee the true ſtate of things there. What argument would it be of any man's virtue to forbear ſinning after he had been in *hell*, and ſeen the miſerable end of ſinners? But I proceed to the

IIId And *laſt* obſervation; namely that notwithſtanding faith be an inferior degree of aſſent, yet it is a principle of ſufficient force and power to govern our lives. *We walk by faith.* Now that the belief of any thing may have its effect upon us, it is requiſite that we be ſatisfied of theſe two things.

1. Of the certainty, and 2. Of the great concernment of the thing. For if the thing be altogether uncertain, it will not move us at all; we ſhall do nothing towards the obtaining of it, if it be good; nor for the avoiding and preventing of it, if it be evil: And if we are certain of the thing, yet if we apprehend it to be of no great moment and concernment,

cernment, we ſhall be apt to ſlight it, as not worth our regard. But the rewards and puniſhments of another world, which the Goſpel propounds to our faith, are fitted to work upon our minds, both upon account of the certainty and concernment of them. For,

1. We have ſufficient aſſurance of the truth of theſe things, as much as we are well capable of in this ſtate. Concerning things future and at a diſtance, we have the dictates of our reaſon arguing us into this perſuaſion, from the conſideration of the juſtice of the divine providence, and from the promiſcuous and unequal adminiſtration of things in this world; from whence wiſe men in all ages have been apt to conclude, that there will be another ſtate of things after this life, wherein rewards and puniſhments ſhall be equally diſtributed. We have the general conſent of mankind in this matter: And to aſſure us, that theſe reaſonings are true, we have a moſt credible revelation of theſe things, God having ſent his Son from heaven to declare it to us, and given us a ſenſible demonſtration of the thing, in his reſurrection from the dead, and his viſible aſcenſion into heaven; ſo that there is no kind of evidence wanting, that the thing is capable of, but only our own ſenſe and experience of theſe things, of which we are not capable in this preſent ſtate. And there is no objection againſt all this, but what will bring all things into uncertainty, which do not come under our ſenſes, and which we ourſelves have not ſeen.

Nor is there any conſiderable intereſt to hinder men from the belief of theſe things, or to make them heſitate about them. For as for the other world, if at laſt there ſhould prove to be no ſuch thing, our condition after death will be the ſame with the condition of thoſe who disbelieve theſe things; becauſe all will be extinguiſh'd by death: But if things fall out otherwiſe (as moſt undoubtedly they will) and our ſouls after this life do paſs into a ſtate of everlaſting happineſs or miſery, then our great intereſt plainly lies, in preparing ourſelves for this ſtate; and there is no other way to ſecure the great concernments of another world, but by believing thoſe things to be true, and governing all the actions of our lives by this belief. For as for the intereſts of *this* life, they are but ſhort and tranſitory, and conſequently of no conſideration in compariſon of the things which are eternal; and yet (as I have often told you) ſetting aſide the caſe of perſecution for religion, there is no real intereſt of this world, but it may be as well promoted and purſued to as great advantage, nay, uſually to a far greater, by him that believes theſe things, and lives accordingly, than by any other perſon: For the belief of the rewards and puniſhments of another world, is the greateſt motive and encouragement to virtue; and as all vice is naturally attended with ſome temporal inconvenience, ſo the practice of all chriſtian virtues doth in its own nature tend both to the welfare of particular perſons, and to the peace and proſperity of mankind.

But that which ought to weigh very much with us, is, that we have abundantly more aſſurance of the recompenſe of another world, than we have of many things in this world, which yet have a greater influence upon our actions, and govern the lives of the moſt prudent and conſiderate men. Men generally hazard their lives and eſtates upon terms of greater uncertainty than the aſſurance which we have of another world. Men venture to take phyſick upon *probable* grounds of the integrity and skill of their phyſician; and yet the want of either of theſe may hazard their lives: And men take phyſick upon greater odds; for it certainly cauſeth pain and ſickneſs, and doth but uncertainly procure and recover health; the patient is ſure to be made ſick, but not certain to be made well; and yet the danger of being worſe, if not of dying on the one hand, and the hope of ſucceſs and recovery on the other, make this hazard and trouble reaſonable. Men venture their whole eſtates to places which they never ſaw; and that there are ſuch places, they have only the concurrent teſtimony and agreement of men; nay, perhaps have only ſpoken with them that have ſpoken with thoſe that have been there. No merchant ever inſiſted upon the evidence of a miracle to be wrought, to ſatisfy him that there were ſuch places as the *Eaſt* and *Weſt-Indies*, before he would venture to trade thither: And yet *this* aſſurance God hath been pleaſed to give the world of a ſtate beyond the grave, and of a bleſſed immortality in another life.

Now, what can be the reaſon that ſo ſlender evidence, ſo ſmall a degree of aſſurance will ſerve to encourage men to ſeek after the things of this world with great care and induſtry; and yet a great deal more will not ſuffice to put them effectually upon looking after the great concernments of another world, which are infinitely more conſiderable? No other reaſon of this can be given, but that men are partial in their affections towards theſe things. It is plain they have not the ſame love for God and religion, which they have for this world and the advantages of it; and therefore it is, that a leſs degree of aſſurance will engage them to ſeek after the one, than the other; and yet the reaſon is much ſtronger on the other ſide: For the greater the benefit and good is, which is offered to us, we ſhould be the more eager to ſeek after it, and ſhould be content to venture upon leſs probability. Upon *exceſſive* odds a man would venture upon very ſmall hopes; for a *mighty* advantage, a man would be content to run a great hazard of his labour and pains upon little aſſurance. Where a man's life is concerned, every ſuſpicion of danger will make a man careful to avoid it. And will nothing affright men from hell, unleſs God carry them thither, and ſhew them the place of torments, and the flames of that fire which ſhall *never be quenched?*

I do not ſpeak this, as if theſe things had not abundant evidence; I have ſhewn that they have; but to convince men how unreaſonable and cruelly partial they are about the concernments of their ſouls, and their eternal happineſs.

2. Suppoſing theſe things to be real and certain, they are of infinite concernment to us. For what can concern us more, than that eternal and unchangeable ſtate, in which we muſt be fixed and abide for ever? If ſo vaſt a concern will not move us, and have no influence upon the government of our lives and actions, we do not deſerve the name of reaſonable creatures. What conſideration can be ſet before men, who are not touched with the ſenſe of ſo great an intereſt, as that of our happy or miſerable being to all eternity? Can we be ſo ſolicitous and careful about the concernment of a few days; and is it nothing to us what becomes of us for ever? Are we ſo tenderly concerned to avoid poverty and diſgrace, perſecution and ſuffering in this world; and ſhall we not much more *flee from the wrath which is to come*, and endeavour *to eſcape the damnation of hell?* Are the ſlight and tranſitory enjoyments of this world, worth ſo much thought and care? And is an eternal inheritance in the heavens, not worth the looking after? As there is no proportion betwixt the things which are temporal, and the things which are eternal; ſo we ought in all reaſon to be infinitely more concern'd for the one than for the other.

The proper inference from all this diſcourſe is, that we would endeavour to ſtrengthen in ourſelves this great principle of a chriſtian life, the belief of another world, by repreſenting to ourſelves all thoſe arguments and conſiderations which may confirm us in this perſuaſion. The more reaſonable our faith is, and the ſurer grounds it is built upon, the more firm it will abide, when it comes to the trial, againſt all the impreſſions of temptations, and aſſaults of perſecution. If our faith of another world be only a ſtrong imagination of theſe things, *ſo ſoon as tribulation ariſeth, it will wither*; *becauſe it hath no root in itſelf.* Upon this account the Apoſtle ſo often exhorts Chriſtians, to endeavour *to be eſtabliſhed in the truth*, *to be rooted and grounded in the faith*, that when perſecution comes, they may *continue ſtedfaſt and unmoveable.* The firmneſs of our belief will have a great influence upon our lives: If we be *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable* in our perſuaſion of theſe things, we ſhall be *abundant in the work of the Lord.* The Apoſtle joins theſe together, 1 *Cor.* xv. 58. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as ye know your labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord. Stedfaſt and unmoveable*, in what? In the belief of a bleſſed reſurrection; which the more firmly any man believes, the more active and induſtrious will he be in the work and ſervice of God.

And that our faith may have a conſtant and powerful influence upon our lives, we ſhould frequently revolve in our minds the thoughts of another world, and of that vaſt eternity which we ſhall ſhortly lanch into. The great diſadvantage of the arguments fetch'd from another world, is this, that theſe things are at a diſtance from us, and not ſenſible to us, and therefore we are not apt to be ſo affected with them; preſent and ſenſible things weigh down all other conſiderations. And therefore to balance this diſadvantage, we ſhould often have theſe thoughts in our minds, and inculcate upon ourſelves the certainty of theſe things and the infinite concernment of them; we ſhould reaſon thus with ourſelves; if theſe things be true, and will certainly be, why ſhould they not be to me, as if they were actually preſent? Why ſhould not I always live, as if heaven were open to my view, and *I ſaw Jeſus ſtanding at the right hand of God*, with crowns of glory in his hands, ready to be ſet upon the heads of all thoſe who continue faithful and obedient to him? And why ſhould I not be as much afraid to commit any ſin, as if *hell were naked before me*, and I ſaw the aſtoniſhing miſeries of the damned?

Thus we ſhould, by frequent meditation, repreſent theſe great things to ourſelves, and bring them nearer to our minds, and oppoſe to the preſent temptations of ſenſe, the great and endleſs happineſs and miſery of the other world. And if we would but thus exerciſe ourſelves about *the things which are not ſeen*, and make eternity familiar to ourſelves, by a frequent meditation of it, we ſhould be very little moved with preſent and ſenſible things; we ſhould *walk* and *live* by faith, as the men of the world do by *ſenſe*, and be more ſerious and earneſt in the purſuit of our great and everlaſting intereſt, than they are in the purſuit of ſenſual enjoyments, and ſhould make it the great buſineſs of this preſent and temporal life, to ſecure a future and eternal happineſs.

SERMON XI.

The Danger of Apoſtaſy from the true Religion.

HEB. x. 38.

But if any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him.

THE great deſign of this epiſtle (whoever was the author of it, which I ſhall not now inquire into) is plainly this, to confirm the *Jews*, who were but newly converted to *chriſtianity*, in the ſtedfaſt profeſſion of that faith which they had embraced, and to arm them againſt that temptation which Chriſtians were then expoſed to, *viz.* the fierce and cruel perſecutions which threatned thoſe of that profeſſion.

And to this purpoſe he repreſents to them the excellency of that religion, above any other former revelation, that God had made of himſelf to the world, both in reſpect of the author and revealer of it, who was the Son of God, and in reſpect of the revelation itſelf; which as it contains better and more perfect directions for a good life, ſo likewiſe more powerful and effectual motives thereto, better promiſes, and more terrible threatnings, than were annexed to the obſervation of the *Jewiſh* law, or clearly and certainly diſcoverable by the light of nature. From theſe conſiderations, he earneſtly perſuades them, all along throughout this epiſtle, to continue conſtant in the profeſſion of this faith, and not to ſuffer themſelves to be frighted out of it by the terror of perſecution, chap. ii. ver. 1. *Therefore we ought to give the more earneſt heed to the things which we have heard, leſt at any time we ſhould let them ſlip*; and chap. iv. 1. *Let us therefore fear, leſt a promiſe being left us of entring into his reſt, any of you ſhould come ſhort of it*; and ver. 23. of this chapter. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith, without wavering*; and to encourage them to conſtancy, he ſets before them the glorious rewards and recompenſes of the Goſpel, ver. 35. *Caſt not away therefore your confidence*, τὴν παῤῥησίαν ὑμῶν, *your free and open profeſſion of chriſtianity, which hath great recompenſe of reward.*

And then on the other hand, to deter them from apoſtaſy from this profeſſion he repreſents to them the horrible danger of it here in the text, *But if any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him.*

I ſhall briefly explain the words, and then proſecute that which I mainly intended in them. *If any man draw back*, Ἐὰν ὑποστείληται: Theſe words with the foregoing, are cited out of the Prophet *Habbakkuk*, chap. ii. ver. 3, 4. and they are cited by the Apoſtle, according to the tranſlation of the LXX, which differs ſomewhat from the *Hebrew*; and the difference ariſeth from the various readings of the *Hebrew* word, which is render'd by the LXX, *to draw back*; but by the change of a letter, ſignifies *to be lifted up*, as we render it in the Prophet; but however that be, the Apoſtle follows the tranſlation of the LXX, and accommodates it to his purpoſe. Ἐὰν ὑποστείληται, *if any man draw back*; the word ſignifies to keep back, to withdraw, to ſneak and ſlink away out of fear, to fail or faint in any enterpriſe: And thus this word is render'd in the new teſtament. *Acts* xx. 20. οὐδὲν ὑπεστειλάμην, *I did not withhold*, or *keep back* *any*

any thing that was profitable for you; and ſo it is ſaid of St. *Peter*, Gal. ii. 12. ὑπέϛελλεν ἑαυτὸν, *he ſlunk away*, or *withdrew himſelf*, *fearing them of the circumciſion*; and the *Hebrew* word which is here render'd by the LXX. *to draw back*, is render'd elſewhere ἐκλείπειν, which is *to fail*, or *faint*; from all which it appears, that by *drawing back*, the Apoſtle here means, mens quitting their profeſſion of chriſtianity, and ſlinking out of it, for fear of ſuffering for it.

My ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him: Theſe words are plainly a μείωσις, and leſs is ſaid than is meant; for the meaning is, that God will be extremely diſpleaſed with them, and puniſh them very ſeverely. The like figure to this, you have *Pſal.* v. 4. *Thou art not a God that haſt pleaſure in wickedneſs*, which in the next verſe is explained, by his hatred and deteſtation of thoſe who are guilty of it, *Thou hateſt all the workers of iniquity.* So that the plain ſenſe of the words is this, that apoſtaſy from the profeſſion of God's true religion, is a thing highly provoking to him, and will be moſt ſeverely puniſhed by him.

In ſpeaking to this argument, I ſhall conſider theſe *four* things.

I. The nature of this ſin of apoſtaſy from religion.

II. The ſeveral ſteps and degrees of it.

III. The heinouſneſs of it.

IV. The great danger of it, and the terrible puniſhment it expoſeth men to. And when I have ſpoken to theſe, I ſhall conclude all with a ſhort exhortation, *to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.*

I. We will conſider the nature of this ſin of apoſtaſy from religion: and it conſiſts in forſaking or renouncing the profeſſion of religion, whether it be by an open declaration in words, or a virtual declaration of it by our actions; for it comes all to one in the ſight of God, and the different manner of doing it, does not alter the nature of the thing. He indeed that renounceth religion by an open declaration in words, offers the greateſt and boldeſt defiance to it; but he is likewiſe an apoſtate, who ſilently withdraws himſelf from the profeſſion of it, who quits it for his intereſt, or for fear diſowns it and ſneaks out of the profeſſion of it, and forſakes the communion of thoſe who own it. Thus *Demas* was an apoſtate, in quitting chriſtianity for ſome worldly intereſt. *Demas hath forſaken* us, *having loved this preſent world*, ſaith St. *Paul*, 2 *Tim.* iv. 10.

And thoſe whom our Saviour deſcribes, *Matth.* xiii. 20, 21. *who received the word into ſtony ground*, were apoſtates out of fear, *they heard the word, and with joy received it*; *but having no root in themſelves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation and perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word, preſently they fall off.*

And there is likewiſe a partial apoſtaſy from chriſtianity, when ſome fundamental article of it is denied, whereby, in effect and by conſequence, the whole chriſtian faith is overthrown. Of this *Hymeneus* and *Philetus* were guilty, of whom the Apoſtle ſays, that they *erred concerning the truth, ſaying that the reſurrection was paſt already, and thereby overthrew the faith of ſome*, 2 *Tim.* ii. 17, 18. that is, they turned the reſurrection into an allegory, and did thereby really deſtroy a moſt fundamental article of the chriſtian religion.

So that to make a man an apoſtate, it is not neceſſary that a man ſhould ſolemnly renounce his baptiſm and declare chriſtianity to be falſe; there are ſeveral other ways whereby a man may bring himſelf under this guilt, as by a ſilent quitting of his religion, and withdrawing himſelf from the communion of all that profeſs it; by denying an eſſential doctrine of chriſtianity; by undermining the great end and deſign of it, by teaching doctrines which directly tend to encourage men in impenitence, and a wicked courſe of life; nay, to authoriſe all manner of impiety and vice, in telling men that whatever they do they cannot ſin; for which the primitive Chriſtians did look upon the *Gnoſticks* as no better than apoſtates from chriſtianity; and tho' they retained the name of Chriſtians, yet not to be truly and really ſo. And there is likewiſe a partial apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion; of which I ſhall ſpeak under the

IId Head I propoſed, which was, to conſider the ſeveral ſorts and degrees of apoſtaſy. The higheſt of all, is the renouncing and forſaking of chriſtianity, or of ſome eſſential part of it, which is a virtual apoſtaſy from it: But there are ſeveral tendencies towards this, which they who are guilty of, are in ſome degree guilty of this ſin. As,

1. Indifferency in religion, and want of all ſort of concernment for it; when a man, though he never quitted his religion, yet is ſo little concerned for it, that a very ſmall occaſion or temptation would make him do it; he is contented to be reckoned in the num-

ber of thoſe who profeſs it, ſo long as it is the faſhion, and he finds no great inconvenience by it; but is ſo indifferent in his mind about it, (like *Gallio who minded none of thoſe things*) that he can turn himſelf into any other ſhape, when his intereſt requires it; ſo that though he never actually deſerted it, yet he is a kind of apoſtate, in the preparation and diſpoſition of his mind: And to ſuch perſons, that title which *Solomon* gives to ſome, may fitly enough be applied, they are *backſliders in heart*.

2. Another tendency to this ſin, and a great degree of it, is withdrawing from the publick marks and teſtimonies of the profeſſion of religion, by forſaking the aſſemblies of Chriſtians for the worſhip and ſervice of God; to withdraw ourſelves from thoſe, for fear of danger or ſuffering, is a kind of denial of our religion. And this was the caſe of ſome in the Apoſtles time, when perſecution grew hot, and the open profeſſion, of chriſtianity dangerous; to avoid this danger, many appeared not in the aſſemblies of Chriſtians, for fear of being obſerved and brought into trouble for it. This the Apoſtle taxeth ſome for in this chapter, and ſpeaketh of it as a letting go our profeſſion, and a kind of deſerting of chriſtianity, ver. 23, 25. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is.* He doth not ſay, they had quitted their profeſſion, but they had but a looſe hold of it, and were ſilently ſtealing away from it.

3. A light temper of mind, which eaſily receives impreſſions from thoſe who lie in wait to deceive and ſeduce men from the truth. When men are not well rooted and eſtabliſhed in religion, they are apt *to be inveigled by the crafty inſinuations of ſeducers, to be moved with every wind of doctrine*, and *to be eaſily ſhaken in mind*, by every trifling piece of ſophiſtry that is confidently obtruded upon them for a weighty argument.

Now this is a temper of mind which diſpoſeth men to apoſtaſy, and renders them an eaſy prey to every one that takes a pleaſure and a pride in making proſelytes. It is true, indeed, a man ſhould always have a mind ready to entertain truth, when it is fairly propoſed to him: But the main things of religion are ſo plainly revealed, and lie ſo obvious to every ordinary capacity, that every man may diſcern them; and when he hath once entertained them, ought to be ſtedfaſt and unmoveable in them, and not ſuffer himſelf to be whiffled out of them by an inſignificant noiſe about the infallibility of a viſible church; much leſs ought he to be moved by any man's uncharitableneſs and poſitiveneſs in damning all that are not of his mind.

There are ſome things ſo very plain, not only in ſcripture, but to the common reaſon of mankind, that no ſubtilty of diſcourſe, no pretended authority, or even infallibility of any church, ought to ſtagger us in the leaſt about them; as that we ought not, or cannot believe any thing in direct contradiction to ſenſe and reaſon; that the people ought to read and ſtudy the holy ſcriptures; and to ſerve God and pray to him in a language which they underſtand; that they ought to receive the ſacrament as our Saviour inſtituted and appointed it, that is in both kinds; that it can neither be our duty, nor lawful to do that which God hath forbidden, as he hath done the worſhip of images in the ſecond commandment, as plainly as words can do it. Upon any one of theſe points, a man would fix his foot, and ſtand alone againſt the whole world.

4. Another degree of apoſtaſy is, a departure from the purity of the chriſtian doctrine and worſhip in a groſs and notorious manner. This is a partial, though not a total apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion, and there have been, and ſtill are ſome in the world, who are juſtly charged with this degree of apoſtaſy from religion; namely ſuch as tho' they retain and profeſs the belief of all the articles of the chriſtian faith, and worſhip *the only true God*, and *him whom he hath ſent*, *Jeſus Chriſt*, yet have greatly perverted the chriſtian religion, by ſuperinducing and adding new articles of faith, and groſs corruptions and ſuperſtitions in worſhip, and impoſing upon men the belief and practice of theſe, as neceſſary to ſalvation. And St. *Paul* is my warrant for this cenſure, who chargeth thoſe who added to the chriſtian religion, the neceſſity of circumciſion, and obſerving the law of *Moſes*, and thereby perverted the Goſpel of Chriſt, as guilty in ſome degree of Apoſtaſy from chriſtianity; for he calls it *preaching another Goſpel*, Gal. 1. 7, 8. *There be ſome that trouble you and would pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt: But tho' we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Goſpel to you, than that which we have preached, let him be accurſed.* And thoſe who were ſeduced by theſe teachers, he chargeth them with having in ſome ſort quitted the Goſpel of Chriſt, and embraced another Goſpel, ver. 6. *I marvel that ye are ſo ſoon removed from him that called you into the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel.* So

that they who thus pervert and corrupt the chriſtian doctrine or worſhip, are plainly guilty of a partial apoſtaſy from chriſtianity; and they who quit the purity of the chriſtian doctrine and worſhip, and go over to the communion of thoſe who have thus perverted chriſtianity, are in a moſt dangerous ſtate, and in the judgment of St. *Paul*, are in ſome ſort *removed unto another Goſpel*. I ſhall now proceed in the

IIId Place, to conſider the heinouſneſs of this ſin. And it will appear to be very heinous, if we conſider, what an affront it is to God, and how great a contempt of him. When God hath revealed his will to mankind, and ſent no leſs perſon than *his own Son* out of his own *boſom* to do it, and hath given ſuch teſtimonies to him from heaven, by *ſigns and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt*; when he hath tranſmitted down to us, ſo faithful a record of this revelation, and of the miracles wrought to confirm it, in the books of the holy ſcriptures; and when we ourſelves have ſo often declared our firm belief of this revelation: Yet after all this to fall from it, and deny it, or any part of it, or to embrace doctrines and practices plainly contrary to it; this certainly cannot be done without the greateſt affront and contempt of the teſtimony of God himſelf; for it is in effect, and by interpretation, to declare that either we do not believe what God ſays, or that we do not fear what he can do. So St. *John* tells us, 1 *Ep.* v. 10. *He that believeth not God, hath made him a lyar, becauſe he believeth not the record which God hath given of his Son.*

And all along in this epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, the Apoſtle ſets himſelf to aggravate this ſin; calling it *an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God*, chap. iii. 12. And he frequently calls it ſo, κατ' ἐξοχὴν, and by way of eminency, as being of all ſins the greateſt and moſt heinous. Chap. x. 26. *If we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth.* That the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of the ſin of apoſtaſy, is plain from the whole ſcope of his diſcourſe; for having exhorted them before, ver. 23. *to hold faſt the profeſſion of their faith without wavering, not forſaking the aſſembling of themſelves together*, he immediately adds, *for if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; that is, if we fall off from chriſtianity, after we have embraced it. And chap. xii. 1. *let us lay aſide every weight, and the ſin which ſo eaſily beſets us*, that is, the great ſin of apoſtaſy from religion, to which they were then ſo ſtrongly tempted by that fierce perſecution which attended it; and therefore he adds, *let us run with patience the race which is ſet before us*, that is, let us arm ourſelves with patience againſt the ſufferings we are like to meet with in our chriſtian courſe. To oppoſe the truth, and reſiſt the clear evidence of it, is a great ſin, and men are juſtly condemned for it. John iii. 19. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light:* But to deſert the truth after we have been convinced of it, to fall off from the profeſſion of it after we have embraced it, is a much greater ſin. Oppoſition to the truth, may proceed in a great meaſure from ignorance and prejudice, which is a great extenuation; and therefore St. *Paul* tells us, that after all his violent perſecution of chriſtianity, *he found mercy becauſe he did it ignorantly and in unbelief.* To revolt from the truth, after we have made profeſſion of it, *after we have known the way of righteouſneſs, to turn from the holy commandment*; this is the great aggravation. The Apoſtle makes wilfulneſs, an uſual ingredient into the ſin of apoſtaſy, *if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth.*

And as this ſin is one of the greateſt affronts to God, ſo it is the higheſt and moſt effectual diſparagement of religion: For it is not ſo much conſidered, what the enemies of religion ſpeak againſt it, becauſe *they ſpeak evil of the things which they know not*, and of which they have had no trial and experience; but he that falls off from religion, after he hath made profeſſion of it, declares to the world, that he hath tried it, and diſlikes it, and pretends to leave it, becauſe he hath not found that truth and goodneſs in it which he expected, and upon long experience of it, ſees reaſon to prefer another religion before it. So that nothing can be more deſpiteful to religion than this, and more likely to bring it into contempt; and therefore the Apoſtle (ver. 29. of this chapter) calls it a *trampling under foot the Son of God, and making the Blood of the covenant a profane thing, and offering deſpite to the Spirit of Grace:* For we cannot put a greater ſcorn upon the Son of God, who revealed this doctrine to the world; nor upon his blood, which was ſhed to confirm and ſeal the truth of it; and upon the Holy Ghoſt, who came down in miraculous gifts to give teſtimony to it; than notwithſtanding all this, to renounce this doctrine, and to forſake this religion.

But we ſhall yet farther ſee the heinouſneſs of this ſin, in the terrible puniſhment it expoſeth men to; which was the

IVth and *laſt* thing I propoſed to conſider. And this is repreſented to us in a moſt terrible manner, not only in this epiſtle, but in other places of ſcripture. This ſin is plac'd in the higheſt rank of pardonable ſins, and next to the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, which our Saviour declares to be abſolutely unpardonable. And indeed the ſcripture ſpeaks very doubtfully of the pardonableneſs of this ſin, as being near akin to that againſt the Holy Ghoſt, being ſaid to be an *offering deſpite to the Spirit of grace.* In the vith chapter of this epiſtle, ver. 4. 5, 6. the Apoſtle ſpeaks in a very ſevere manner, concerning the ſtate of thoſe, who had apoſtatiſed from chriſtianity, after the ſolemn profeſſion of it in baptiſm; *It is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightened* (that is baptiſed) *and have taſted of the heavenly gift,* (that is regeneration) *and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt; and have taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,* (that is, have been inſtructed in the chriſtian religion, and endowed with the miraculous powers of the goſpel-age, for the *Jews* uſed to call the age of the *Meſſias, ſeculum futurum,* or *the world to come) it is impoſſible for thoſe to be renewed again unto repentance*; where the leaſt we can underſtand by *impoſſible* is, that it is extremely difficult; for ſo the word *impoſſible* is ſometimes uſed; as when our Saviour ſays, *it is impoſſible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And Chap. x. 26. the Apoſtle ſpeaking of the ſame thing, ſays *if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin*; that is, they who renounce chriſtianity, ſince they reject the only way of expiation, *there remains no more ſacrifice for their ſins.*

St. *Peter* likewiſe expreſſeth himſelf very ſeverely concerning this ſort of perſons, 2 *Epiſt.* ii. 20, 21. *For if after they have eſcaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt,* (that is, after they have been brought from heatheniſm to chriſtianity) *they are intangled therein again, and overcome; the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning.* He ſeems loth to ſay how ſad the condition of ſuch perſons is; but this he tells them, that it is much worſe than when they were heathens before; and he gives the reaſon, *for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* And St. *John* calls this ſin of apoſtaſy, the *ſin unto death*; and tho' he do not forbid Chriſtians to pray for them that are guilty of it; yet he will not ſay, that they ſhould pray for them, 1 *Epiſt.* v. 16. *If any man ſee his brother ſin a ſin, which is not unto death, he ſhall ask, and he ſhall give him life, for them that ſin not unto death; there is a ſin unto death, I do not ſay, that he ſhall pray for it.* Now that by this *ſin unto death,* the Apoſtle means apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion to idolatry, is moſt probable from what follows, ver. 18. *we know that whoſoever is born of God, ſinneth not,* (that is, this ſin unto death) *but he that is begotten of God keepeth himſelf, and the wicked one toucheth him not,* (that is, he is preſerved from idolatry, unto which the devil had ſeduced ſo great a part of mankind) *and we know that we are of God, and the whole world,* ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *is under the dominion of that wicked one,* (*viz.* the devil, whom the ſcripture elſewhere calls *the God of this world*;) *and we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an underſtanding, that we may know him that is true,* (that is, hath brought us from the worſhip of falſe Gods to the knowledge and worſhip of the true God;) and then he concludes, *little children, keep yourſelves from idols*; which caution hath no manner of dependence upon what went before, unleſs we underſtand *the ſin unto death,* in this ſenſe; and it is the more probable, that it is ſo to be underſtood, becauſe apoſtaſy is ſo often in this *epiſtle* to the *Hebrews* called *the ſin,* by way of eminency, as it is here, by St. *John, whoſoever is born of God, ſinneth not.*

So that at the very beſt, the ſcripture ſpeaks doubtfully of the pardon of this ſin; however, that the puniſhment of it, unrepented of, ſhall be very dreadful. It ſeems to be mildly expreſt here in the text, *If any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him:* But it is the more ſevere, for being expreſt ſo mildly, according to the intention of the figure here uſed; and therefore in the next words, this expreſſion of God's taking no pleaſure in ſuch perſons, is explained by their utter ruin and perdition; *But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition.* And in ſeveral parts of this *epiſtle,* there are very ſevere paſſages to this purpoſe; chap. ii. 2, 3. *If the word ſpoken by Angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received* *a juſt recompenſe of reward; how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?* And chap. x. 26, 27. *If we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which ſhall devour the adverſary. He that deſpiſed Moſes's law, died without mercy, under two or three witneſſes; of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be thought worthy, that hath troden under foot the Son of God?* &c. *For we know him who hath ſaid, vengeance is mine, I will recompenſe ſaith the Lord:* And again, *The Lord ſhall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* What can be more ſevere and terrible than theſe expreſſions?

I will mention but one text more, and that is *Rev.* xxi. 8. where in the catalogue of great ſinners, thoſe who apoſtatiſe from religion, out of fear, do lead the van: *He that overcometh ſhall inherit all things,* (which is elſewhere in this book expreſs'd, by continuing *faithful unto the death*;) *He that overcometh ſhall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he ſhall be my Son: But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and whoremongers, and ſorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, ſhall have their part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimſtone, which is the ſecond death. The fearful, and unbelievers, and liars,* that is, they who out of fear relapſe into infidelity, and abide not in the truth, ſhall be reckoned in the firſt rank of offenders, and be puniſhed accordingly.

And thus I have done with the *four* things I propounded to ſpeak to, from theſe words; the nature of apoſtaſy; the ſeveral ſteps and degrees of it; the heinous nature of this ſin; the danger of it, and the terrible puniſhment it expoſeth men to.

And is there any need now, to exhort men *to hold faſt the profeſſion of faith,* when the danger of *drawing back* is ſo evident, and ſo terrible? or is there any reaſon and occaſion for it? certainly there is no great danger amongſt us, of mens apoſtatiſing from chriſtianity, and turning *Jews,* or *Turks,* or *Heathens*; I do not think there is, but yet for all that, we are not free from the danger of apoſtaſy; there is great danger, not of mens apoſtatiſing from one religion to another, but from religion to infidelity and atheiſm; and of this worſt kind of apoſtaſy of all other, I wiſh the age we live in had not afforded us too many inſtances. It is greatly to be lamented, that among thoſe who have profeſs'd chriſtianity, any ſhould be found that ſhould make it their endeavour to undermine the great principles of all religion; the belief of a God, and his providence; and of the immortality of the ſouls of men; and a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after this life; and to bring the moſt ſerious matters in the world into contempt, and to turn them into jeſt and rallery. This is not only a renouncing of chriſtianity, the religion which God hath revealed, but even of the religion which is born with us, and the principles and notions which God hath planted in every man's mind: This is an impiety of the firſt magnitude, and not to be mentioned without grief and horror; and this, it is to be feared, hath had a great hand in thoſe great calamities which our eyes have ſeen; and I pray God it do not draw down ſtill more and greater judgments upon this nation: But I hope there are none here that need to be cautioned againſt this horrible impiety, and higheſt degree of *apoſtaſy from the living God.* That which people are much more in danger of, is apoſtaſy from the purity of the chriſtian doctrine and worſhip, ſo happily recovered by a regular reformation, and eſtabliſhed among us by all the authority that laws, both eccleſiaſtical and civil, can give it; and which, in truth, is no other than the ancient and primitive chriſtianity; I ſay, a defection from this, to thoſe groſs errors and ſuperſtitions, which the reformation had pared off, and freed us from. I do not ſay, that this is a total apoſtaſy from chriſtianity; but it is a partial apoſtaſy and defection, and a very dangerous one; and that thoſe, who, *after they have received the knowledge of the truth,* fall off from it into thoſe errors and corruptions, are highly guilty before God, and their condition certainly worſe, and more dangerous, than of thoſe who are brought up in thoſe errors and ſuperſtitions, and never knew better; for there are terrible threatnings in ſcripture againſt thoſe who fall away from the truth, which they once embraced, and were convinced of; *If we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth,* &c. *and if any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him.*

God conſiders every man's advantages and opportunities of knowledge, and their diſadvantages likewiſe; and makes all reaſonable allowances for them; and for men to continue in the errors they have been always brought up in, or, which comes much to one, in errors which they were led into by principles early infuſed into them, before they were in any meaſure competent judges of thoſe matters; I ſay for ſuch perſons to continue in thoſe errors, and to oppoſe and reject the contrary truths, againſt which, by their education, they have received ſo ſtrong and violent a prejudice, this may be in a great degree excuſable, and find pardon with God, upon a general repentance for all ſins, both known and unknown, and cannot be reaſonably charged with the guilt of this great ſin of apoſtaſy: But not to abide in the truth, after we have entertained and profeſſed it, having ſufficient means and advantages of knowing it, hath no excuſe.

I would not be raſh in condemning particular perſons of any ſociety or communion of Chriſtians, provided they be ſincerely devout, and juſt, and ſober, to the beſt of their knowledge; I had much rather leave them to God, whoſe mercies are great, than to paſs an uncharitable cenſure upon them, as to their eternal ſtate and condition: But the caſe is far otherwiſe, where the opportunities of knowledge are afforded to men, and *men love darkneſs rather than light*; for they who have the means and advantages of *knowing their maſter's will,* are anſwerable to God as if they had known it; becauſe if they had not been groſly negligent, and wanting to themſelves, they might have known it.

And this, I fear, is the caſe of the generality of thoſe who have been bred up to years of conſideration and choice in the reformed religion, and forſake it; becauſe they do it without ſufficient reaſon, and there are invincible objections againſt it: They do it without ſufficient reaſon; becauſe every one amongſt us, knows, or may know upon very little enquiry, that we hold all the articles of the faith, which are contained in the ancient creeds of the chriſtian church, and into which all Chriſtians are baptiſed; that we inculcate upon men the neceſſity of a good life, and of ſincere repentance, and perfect contrition for our ſins, ſuch as is followed with real reformation and amendment of our lives, and that, without this, no man can be ſaved by any device whatſoever.

Now what reaſon can any man have, to queſtion whether he may be ſaved in that faith which ſaved the firſt Chriſtians, and by believing the twelve articles of the Apoſtles creed, though he cannot ſwallow the twelve articles which are added to it in the creed of Pope *Pius* IV, every one of which, beſides many and great corruptions and ſuperſtitions in worſhip, are ſo many and invincible objections againſt the communion of the *Roman* church, as I could particularly ſhew, if it had not been already done, in ſo many learned treatiſes upon this argument? What is there then, that ſhould move any reaſonable man to forſake the communion of our church, and to quit the reformed religion?

There are three things chiefly with which they endeavour to amuſe and affright weaker minds.

1. A great noiſe of infallibility, which, they tell us, is ſo excellent a means to determine and put an end to all differences. To which I ſhall at preſent only object this prejudice; that there are not wider and hotter differences among us, about any thing whatſoever, than are amongſt them, about this admirable means of ending all differences; as, where this infallibility is ſeated, that men may know how to have recourſe to it, for the ending of differences.

2. They endeavour to fright men with the danger of ſchiſm. But every man knows that the guilt of ſchiſm lies at their door, who impoſe ſinful articles of communion; and not upon them, who, for fear of ſinning againſt God, cannot ſubmit to thoſe articles; which we have done, and are ſtill ready to make good, to be the caſe betwixt us and the church of *Rome.* But,

3. The terrible engine of all is, their poſitive and confident damning of all that live and die out of the communion of their church. This I have fully ſpoken to upon another occaſion, and therefore ſhall only ſay at preſent, that every man ought to have better thoughts of God, than to believe, that he, *who delighteth not in the death of ſinners,* and *would have all men to be ſaved, and come to the knowledge of the truth,* will confirm the ſentence of ſuch uncharitable men, as take upon them to condemn men for thoſe things, for which our Saviour in his Goſpel condemns no man. And of all things in the world, one would think that the uncharitableneſs of any church ſhould be an argument to no man to run into its communion.

I ſhall conclude with the Apoſtle's exhortation, verſe the 23d of this chapter, *let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our Faith without wavering; and provoke one another to charity and good works; and ſo much the more, becauſe the day approacheth, in which God will judge the faith and lives of men by Jeſus Chriſt, according to his Goſpel.*

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

SERMON XII.

Of Self-denial and Suffering for Chriſt's Sake.

Matth. xvi. 24.

Then ſaid Jeſus unto his Diſciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me.

THEN *ſaid Jeſus to his Diſciples*, that is, upon occaſion of his former diſcourſe with them, wherein he had acquainted them with his approaching paſſion, that he muſt ſhortly go up to *Jeruſalem*, and there ſuffer many things of the *elders and chief prieſts and ſcribes*, and at laſt be put to death by them; *then ſaid Jeſus to his Diſciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me.*

If any man will come after me, or *follow me*; that is, if any man will be my diſciple, and undertake the profeſſion of my religion; if any man chooſe and reſolve to be a Chriſtian; he muſt be ſo upon theſe terms, he muſt *deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me*; he muſt follow me in ſelf-denial and ſuffering.

In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall do theſe *four* things.

I. I ſhall conſider the way and method which our Saviour uſeth in making proſelytes, and gaining men over to his religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel them to the profeſſion of his religion; but fairly offers it to their conſideration and choice, and tells them plainly upon what terms they muſt be his diſciples; and if they be contented and reſolved to ſubmit to theſe terms, well; if not, it is in vain to follow him any longer: for *they cannot be his diſciples.*

II. I ſhall endeavour to explain this duty of ſelf-denial, expreſs'd in theſe words, *let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me.*

III. I ſhall conſider the ſtrict and indiſpenſable obligation of it, whenever we are called to it; *Without this we cannot be Chriſt's diſciples*; *If any man will come after me, or be my diſciple, let him deny himſelf.*

IV. I ſhall endeavour to vindicate the reaſonableneſs of this precept of ſelf-denial and ſuffering for Chriſt, which at firſt appearance may ſeem to be ſo very harſh and difficult; and I ſhall go over theſe particulars as briefly as I can.

I. We will conſider the way and method which our Saviour here uſeth in making proſelytes, and gaining men over to his religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel men to the profeſſion of his religion; but fairly propoſeth it to their conſideration and choice, telling them plainly upon what terms they muſt be his diſciples; if they like them, and are content, and reſolved to ſubmit to them, well; he is willing to receive them, and own them for his diſciples: If not, it is in vain to follow him any longer: *For they cannot be his diſciples.* As, on the one hand, he offers them no worldly preferment and advantage to intice them into his religion, and to tempt them outwardly to profeſs what they do not inwardly believe; ſo, on the other hand, he does not hale and drag them by force, and awe them by the terrors of torture and death to ſign the chriſtian faith, tho' moſt undoubtedly true, and to confeſs with their mouths, and ſubſcribe with their hands, what they do not believe in their hearts. He did not obtrude his ſacraments upon them, and plunge them into the water to baptiſe them, whether they would or no, and thruſt the ſacrament of bread into their mouths; as if men might be worthy receivers of that bleſſed ſacrament, whether they receive it willingly or no.

Our bleſſed Saviour, the author and founder of our religion, made uſe of none of theſe ways of violence, ſo contrary to the nature of man, and of all religion, eſpecially of chriſtianity, and fitted only to make men hypocrites, but not converts, he only ſays, *If any man will be my diſciple*; he uſeth no arguments, but ſuch as are ſpiritual, and proper to work upon the minds and conſciences of men. *For as his kingdom was not of this world*, ſo neither are the motives and arguments to induce men to be his ſubjects, taken from this world; but from the endleſs rewards and puniſhments of another. *The weapons* which he made uſe of to ſubdue men to the obedience of faith were not *carnal*; and yet they were *mighty through God*, to conquer the obſtinacy and infidelity of men. This great and infallible teacher, who certainly came from God, all that he does, is to propoſe his religion to men, with ſuch evidence and ſuch arguments as are proper to convince men of the truth and goodneſs of it, and to perſuade men to embrace it; and he acquaints them likewiſe with all the worldly diſadvantages of it, and the hazards and ſufferings that would attend it; and now if upon full conſideration they will make his religion their free choice, and become his diſciples, he is willing to receive them; if they will not, he underſtands the nature of religion better than to go about to force it upon men, whether they will or no.

II. I ſhall endeavour to explain this duty or precept of ſelf-denial, expreſſed in theſe words, *Let him deny himſelf and take up his croſs.* Theſe are difficult terms for a man *to deny himſelf*, and *take up his own croſs*, that is willingly to ſubmit to all thoſe ſufferings which the malice of men may inflict for the ſake of Chriſt and his religion. For this expreſſion of *taking up one's croſs*, is a plain alluſion to the *Roman* cuſtom, which was this, that he that was condemned to be crucified, was to take his croſs upon his ſhoulders, and to carry it to the place of execution; this the *Jews* made our Saviour to do as we read *John* xix. 17. till that being ready to faint under it, and leſt he ſhould die away before he was nailed to the croſs, they compelled *Simon* of *Cyrene* to carry it for him, as is declared by the other Evangeliſts; and yet he tells them, *they that will be his diſciples muſt follow him, bearing their own croſs*, that is, being ready (if God call them to it) to ſubmit to the like ſufferings for him and his truth, which he was ſhortly to undergo for the truth and their ſakes.

But tho' theſe terms ſeem very hard; yet they are not unreaſonable, as I ſhall ſhew in the concluſion of this diſcourſe. Some indeed have made them ſo by extending this ſelf-denial too far, attending more to the latitude of the words, than to the meaning and ſcope of our Saviour's diſcourſe: For there is no doubt but that there are a great many things which may properly enough be called ſelf-denial, which yet our Saviour never intended to oblige Chriſtians to. It is no doubt great ſelf-denial, for a man, without any neceſſity, to deny himſelf the neceſſary ſupports of life; for a man to ſtarve and make away himſelf: But no man certainly ever imagined, that our Saviour ever intended by this precept to enjoin this kind of ſelf-denial.

It is plain then, that there is no reaſon or neceſſity to extend this precept of our Saviour concerning ſelf-denial, to every thing that may properly enough be called by that name; and therefore this precept muſt be limited by the plain ſcope and intendment of our Saviour's diſcourſe; and no man can argue thus; *ſuch a thing is ſelf-denial, therefore our Saviour requires it of his diſciples*: For our Saviour doth not here require all kinds of ſelf-denial; but limits it by his diſcourſe to one certain kind, beyond which ſelf-denial is no duty by virtue of this text; and therefore for our clearer underſtanding of this precept of ſelf-denial, I ſhall do theſe *two things*.

Firſt, Remove ſome ſorts of ſelf-denial, which are inſtanced in by ſome, as intended in this precept.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew what kind of ſelf-denial that is, which our Saviour here intends.

Firſt, There are ſeveral things brought under this precept of ſelf-denial, which were never intended by our Saviour. I ſhall inſtance in two or three things, which are moſt frequently inſiſted upon, and ſome of them by very devout and well-meaning men; as that in matters of faith, we ſhould deny and renounce our own ſenſes and our reaſon; nay that we ſhould be content to renounce our own eternal happineſs, and be willing to be damned for the glory of God and the good of our brethren. But all theſe are ſo apparently and groſly unreaſonable, that it is a wonder that any one ſhould ever take them for inſtances of that ſelf-denial which our Saviour requires; eſpecially conſidering, that in all his diſcourſe of ſelf-denial, he does not ſo much as glance at any of theſe inſtances, or any thing like to them.

1. Some comprehend under ſelf-denial, the denying and renouncing our own ſenſes in matters of faith. And if this could be made out to be intended by our Saviour in this precept, we needed not diſpute any of the other inſtances. For he that renounceth the certainty of ſenſe, ſo as not to believe what he ſees, may after this renounce and deny

any thing. For the evidence of ſenſe is more clear and unqueſtionable than that of faith, as the ſcripture frequently intimates; as *John* xx. 29. where our Saviour reproves *Thomas*, for refuſing to believe his reſurrection, upon any leſs evidence than that of ſenſe; *Becauſe thou haſt ſeen, thou haſt believed: Bleſſed are they which have not ſeen, and yet have believed*; which plainly ſuppoſeth the evidence of ſenſe to be the higheſt and cleareſt degree of evidence. So likewiſe that of St. *Paul* 2 *Cor.* v. 7. *We walk by faith and not by ſight*; where the evidence of *faith* as that which is more imperfect and obſcure, is oppoſed to that of *ſight*, as more clear and certain. So that to believe any article of faith, in contradiction to the clear evidence of ſenſe, is contrary to the very nature of aſſent, which always yields to the greateſt and cleareſt evidence.

Beſides that our belief of religion is *at laſt* reſolved into the certainty of ſenſe: So that by renouncing *that*, we deſtroy and undermine the very foundation of our faith. One of the plaineſt and principal proofs of the being of God (which is the firſt and fundamental article of all religion) relies upon the certainty of ſenſe, namely the frame of this viſible world, by the contemplation whereof we are led to the acknowledgment of the inviſible author of it. So St. *Paul* tell us, *Rom.* i. 20. That *the inviſible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.*

And the great external evidence of the chriſtian religion, I mean miracles, is at laſt reſolved into the certainty of ſenſe, without which we can have no aſſurance that any miracle was wrought for the confirmation of it.

And the knowledge likewiſe of the chriſtian faith is conveyed to us by our ſenſes; the evidence whereof, if it be uncertain, takes away all certainty of faith. *How ſhall they believe*, ſaith St. *Paul*, *Rom.* x. 14. *How ſhall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard?* And ver. 17. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* So that to deny and renounce our ſenſes in matters of faith, is to take away the main pillar and foundation of it.

2. Others, almoſt with equal abſurdity, would comprehend under our Saviour's precept of ſelf-denial, the denying and renouncing of our reaſon in matters of faith. And this is ſelf-denial with a witneſs, for a man to deny his own reaſon, for it is to deny himſelf to be a man. This ſurely is a very great miſtake, and tho' the ground of it may be innocent; yet the conſequences of it, and the diſcourſes upon it are very abſurd.

The ground of the miſtake is this. Men think they deny their own reaſon, when they aſſent to the revelation of God in ſuch things, as their own reaſon could neither have diſcovered, nor is able to give the reaſon of: Whereas in this caſe, a man is ſo far from denying his own reaſon, that he does that which is moſt agreeable to it. For what more reaſonable than to believe whatever we are ſufficiently aſſur'd is reveal'd to us by God who can neither be deceived himſelf, nor deceive us?

But tho' the ground of this miſtake may be innocent, yet the conſequences of it are moſt abſurd and dangerous. For if we are to renounce our reaſon in matters of faith, then are we bound to believe without reaſon, which no man can do; or if he could, then faith would be unreaſonable, and infidelity reaſonable. So that this inſtance likewiſe of ſelf-denial, to renounce and deny our own reaſon, as it is no where expreſt, ſo it cannot reaſonably be thought to be intended by our Saviour in this precept.

3. Nor doth this precept of ſelf-denial require men to be content to renounce their own eternal happineſs, and to be willing to be damned for the glory of God, and the good of their brethren. If this were the meaning of this precept, we might juſtly ſay, as the diſciples did to our Saviour, in another caſe, *this is a hard ſaying and who can bear it?* The very thought of this is enough to make human nature to tremble at its very foundation. For the deepeſt principle that God hath planted in our nature is *the deſire of our own preſervation and happineſs*, and into this the force of all laws, and the reaſon of all our duty is at laſt reſolved.

From whence it plainly follows, that it can be no man's duty in any caſe to renounce his own happineſs, and to be content to be for ever miſerable; becauſe if once this be made a duty, there will be no argument left, to perſuade any man to it. For the moſt powerful arguments, that God ever uſed, to perſuade men to any thing, are the promiſe of eternal happineſs, and the terror of everlaſting torments: But if this were a man's duty, to be content to be miſerable for ever, neither of theſe arguments would be of force ſufficient to perſuade a man to it.

The firſt of theſe, namely the promiſe of eternal happineſs, could ſignify nothing to him that is to be eternally miſerable; becauſe if he be to be ſo, it is impoſſible that he ſhould ever have the benefit of that promiſe; and the threatning of eternal miſery, could be no argument in this caſe; becauſe the duty is juſt as difficult, as the argument is powerful, and no man can be moved to ſubmit to any thing, that is grievous and terrible, but by ſomething that is more terrible; for if it be not, it is the ſame thing whether he ſubmit to it, or not; and then no man can be content to be eternally miſerable, only for the fear of being ſo; for this would be for a man to run himſelf upon that very inconvenience which he is ſo much afraid of; and 'tis madneſs for a man to die for fear of death. *Quis novus hic furor eſt, ne moriare, mori?*

By this it plainly appears, how unreaſonable it is to imagine, that by this precept of ſelf-denial, our Saviour ſhould require men to renounce everlaſting happineſs and to be content to be miſerable for ever, upon any account whatſoever; becauſe this were to ſuppoſe, that God hath impoſed that upon us as a duty, to oblige us whereto there can be no argument offer'd that can be powerful enough.

As for the glory of God, which is pretended to be the reaſon, it is an impoſſible ſuppoſition; becauſe it cannot be for the glory of God, to make a creature for ever miſerable, that ſhall not by his wilful obſtinacy and impenitence deſerve to be ſo. But this is only caſt in to add weight.

The other reaſon of the good and ſalvation of our brethren, is the only conſideration for which there is any manner of colour from ſcripture; and two inſtances are alledged to this purpoſe, of two very excellent perſons, that ſeem to have deſired this, and to have ſubmitted to it; and therefore it is not ſo unreaſonable as we would make it, that our Saviour ſhould enjoin it as a duty. The inſtances alledged are theſe. *Moſes* deſired of God that he might be blotted out of the book of life, rather than the people of *Iſrael* whom he had conducted and governed ſo long, ſhould be deſtroyed: and in the New Teſtament, St. *Paul* tells us, that *he could wiſh, that himſelf were accurſed from Chriſt for his brethren*; ſo earneſt a deſire had he of their ſalvation.

But neither of theſe inſtances are of force ſufficient to overthrow the reaſons of my former diſcourſe; for the deſire of *Moſes* amounts only to a ſubmiſſion to a temporal death, that his nation might be ſaved from a temporal ruin. For the expreſſion of *blotting out of the book of life*, is of the ſame importance with thoſe phraſes ſo frequently uſed in the Old Teſtament, *of blotting out from the face of the earth*, and *blotting out one's name from under heaven*, which ſignify no more than temporal death and deſtruction; and then *Moſes*'s wiſh was reaſonable and generous, and ſignifies no more, but that he was willing, if God pleaſed, to die to ſave the nation.

As for St. *Paul*'s wiſh of *being accurſed from Chriſt*, it is plainly an hyperbolical expreſſion of his great affection to his country-men the *Jews*, and his zeal for their ſalvation, which was ſo great, that if it had been a thing reaſonable and lawful, he could have wiſh'd the greateſt evil to himſelf for their ſakes; and therefore it is obſervable, that it is not a poſitive and abſolute wiſh, but expreſt in the uſual form of uſhering in an hyperbole; *I could wiſh*; juſt as we are wont to ſay, when we would expreſs a thing to the height, which is not fit nor intended to be done by us, *I could wiſh, ſo or ſo*; *I could even afford to do this or that*; which kind of ſpeeches, no man takes for a ſtrict and preciſe declaration of our minds, but for a figurative expreſſion of a great paſſion.

And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing I propoſed for the explication of this precept, or duty of ſelf-denial, which was to remove ſome ſorts of ſelf-denial, which by ſome are frequently inſtanced in, as intended by our Saviour in this precept. I proceed now to the

Second thing I propoſed, which is to declare poſitively, what that ſelf-denial is which our Saviour here intends; and 'tis plainly this, and nothing but this; that we ſhould be willing to part with all earthly comforts and conveniences, to quit all our temporal intereſts and enjoyments, and even life itſelf, for the ſake of Chriſt and his religion; this our Saviour means, *by denying ourſelves:* And then (which is much the ſame with the other) that we ſhould be willing to bear any temporal inconvenience and ſuffering upon the ſame account; this *is to take up our croſs and follow him.*

And that this is the full meaning of theſe two phraſes, *of denying ourſelves*, and *taking up our croſs*, will clearly appear, by conſidering the particular inſtances, which our Saviour gives of this ſelf-denial, whenever he hath occaſion to ſpeak of it, by which you will plainly ſee, that theſe expreſſions amount to no more than I have ſaid. Even here in the *text*, after our Saviour had told his Diſciples, that *he that would come after him, muſt* *deny himſelf and take up his croſs*; It follows immediately, *For whoſoever will ſave his life ſhall loſe it; and whoſoever will loſe his life for my ſake ſhall find it.* You ſee here, that he inſtanceth in parting with our lives for him, as the higheſt piece of ſelf-denial, which he requires. And he himſelf elſewhere tells us, *that greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend.* Elſewhere he inſtanceth in quitting our neareſt relations for his ſake, *Luke* xiv. 26, 27. *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and ſiſters, yea and his own life alſo, he cannot be my diſciple; and whoſoever doth not bear his croſs and come after me, he cannot be my diſciple.*

Which expreſſions, of *hating father and mother, and other relations, and even life itſelf*, are not to be underſtood rigorouſly, and in an abſolute ſenſe, but comparatively; for it is an *Hebrew* manner of ſpeech, to expreſs that abſolutely, which is meant only comparatively; and ſo our Saviour explains himſelf in a parallel *text* to this, *Matth.* x. 37, 38. *He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me; he that loveth ſon or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his croſs and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* In another place our Saviour inſtanceth in quitting our eſtates for his ſake, *Matt.* xix. 29. *Every one that ſhall forſake houſes, or brethren, or ſiſters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or lands for my names ſake*; by all which it appears that this ſelf-denial which our Saviour here requires of his diſciples, is to be extended no farther, than to a readineſs and willingneſs, whenever God ſhall call us to it, to quit all our temporal intereſts and enjoyments, and even life itſelf, the deareſt of all other, and to ſubmit to any temporal inconvenience and ſuffering for his ſake. And thus much for the explication of the precept here in the *text*. I proceed in the

IIId place, to conſider the ſtrict and indiſpenſable obligation of this precept of ſelf-denial, and ſuffering for Chriſt and his truth, rather than to forſake and renounce them. *If any man will come after me*, or *be my diſciple, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me*; that is, upon theſe terms he muſt be my diſciple, in this manner he muſt follow me; and in the *text* I mention'd before he declares again, that he that is not ready to quit all his relations and even life itſelf for his ſake, *is not worthy of him, and cannot be his diſciple; and whoſoever doth not bear his croſs, and come after him, cannot be his diſciple*; ſo that we cannot be the diſciples of Chriſt, nor be worthy to be called by his name, if we be not ready thus to deny ourſelves for his ſake: And not only ſo; but if for fear of the croſs, or of any temporal ſufferings, we ſhould renounce and deny him, he threatens *to deny us before his Father which is in heaven, (i. e.)* to deprive us of eternal life, and to ſentence us to everlaſting miſery, *Matth.* x. 32. *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him will I confeſs before my Father which is in heaven: But whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven*; and *Mark.* viii. 38. *Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with his holy Angels:* that is when he cometh to judge the world, they ſhall not be able to ſtand in that judgment; for that by his *being aſhamed of them*, is meant, that they ſhall be condemned by him, is plain from what goes before, ver. 36, 37. *What ſhall it profit a man if he ſhall gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* and then it follows, *Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words.*

But becauſe ſome have the confidence to tell the world, that our Saviour doth not require thus much of Chriſtians; but all that he obligeth us to, is to believe in him in our hearts, but not to make any outward profeſſion of his religion, when the magiſtrate forbids it, and we are in danger of ſuffering for it; I ſhall therefore briefly examine what is pretended for ſo ſtrange an aſſertion, and ſo directly contrary to the whole tenor of the Goſpel, and to the expreſs words of our Saviour.

The author of the book called the *Leviathan* tells us, that we are not only not bound to confeſs Chriſt, but we are obliged to deny him, in caſe the magiſtrate requireth us ſo to do: his words are theſe; *What if the ſovereign forbid us to believe in Chriſt?* he anſwers, *Such forbidding is of no effect, becauſe belief and unbelief never follow mens commands. But what* (ſays he) *if we be commanded by our lawful prince to ſay with our tongues we believe not; muſt we obey ſuch commands?* To this he anſwers, *that profeſſion with the tongue is but an external thing, and no more than any* *other geſture, whereby we ſignify our obedience, and wherein a Chriſtian, holding firmly in his heart the faith of Chriſt, hath the ſame liberty which the Prophet* Eliſha *allowed to* Naaman. *But what then* (ſays he) *ſhall I anſwer to our Saviour, ſaying,* Whoſoever denieth me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven? his anſwer is, *this we may ſay, that whatſoever a ſubject is compell'd to in obedience to his ſovereign, and does it not in order to his own mind, but the law of his country, the action is not his, but his ſovereign's; nor is it he that in this caſe denies Chriſt before men, but his governor, and the laws of his country.*

But can any man, that in good earneſt pays any degree of reverence to our bleſſed Saviour and his religion, think to baffle ſuch plain words by ſo frivolous an anſwer? there is no man doubts, but if the magiſtrate ſhould command men to deny Chriſt, he would be guilty of a great ſin in ſo doing: But if *we muſt obey God rather than men,* and every man muſt *give an account of himſelf to God*; how will this excuſe him that denies Chriſt, or breaks any other commandment of God upon the command of the magiſtrate? And to put the matter out of all doubt, that our Saviour forbids all that will be his diſciples upon pain of damnation, to deny him, tho' the magiſtrate ſhould command them to do ſo, it is very obſervable, that in that very place where he ſpeaks of confeſſing or denying him before men, he puts this very caſe of their being brought before kings and governors for confeſſing him, *Matth.* x. 17. *Beware* (ſays he) *of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will ſcourge you in their ſynagogues; and ye ſhall be brought before governors and kings for my ſake for a teſtimony againſt them and the Gentiles.* But what teſtimony would this be againſt them, if Chriſtians were bound to deny Chriſt at their command? But our Saviour goes on, and tells them how they ought to demean themſelves, when they were brought before kings and governors, ver. 19. *But when they ſhall deliver you up, take ye no thought how or what ye ſhall ſpeak, for it ſhall be given you in that very hour what you ſhall ſpeak.* But what need of any ſuch extraordinary aſſiſtance in the caſe, if they had nothing to do but to deny him, when they were required by the magiſtrate to do it? And then (proceeding in the ſame diſcourſe) he bids them, ver. 28. *Not to fear them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do*; that is, not to deny him, for fear of any temporal puniſhment or ſuffering the magiſtrate could inflict upon them; *but to fear* and obey *him who can deſtroy body and ſoul in hell.* And upon this diſcourſe our Saviour concludes, ver. 32, 33. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall confeſs me before men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father which is in heaven: but whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven.* And now can any thing be plainer, than that our Saviour requires his diſciples to make confeſſion of him before kings and governors, and not to deny him for fear of any thing which they can do to them? But let us enquire a little farther, and ſee how the Apoſtles, who received this precept from our Saviour himſelf, did underſtand it. *Acts* iv. 18. We find *Peter* and *John* ſummoned before the *Jewiſh* magiſtrates, who *ſtrictly commanded them not to ſpeak at all, nor teach in the name of Jeſus. But Peter and John anſwer'd and ſaid unto them, whether it be right in the ſight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* And when they ſtill perſiſted in their courſe, notwithſtanding the command of the magiſtrate, and were called again before the council, Chap. v. 28. and *the high-prieſt asked them, ſaying, did we not ſtraitly command you, that you ſhould not teach in this name? and behold ye have filled Jeruſalem with your doctrine:* They return them again the ſame anſwer, ver. 29. *Then Peter and the other Apoſtles anſwered and ſaid, we ought to obey God rather than men.*

And let any man now judge, whether our Saviour did not oblige men to confeſs him even before magiſtrates, and to obey him rather than men. And iudeed, how can any man in reaſon think, that the great king and governor of the world ſhould inveſt any man with a power to control his authority, and to oblige men to diſobey and renounce him, *by whom kings reign, and princes decree judgment?* This is a thing ſo unreaſonable, that it can hardly be imagined, that any thing but downright malice againſt God and religion could prompt any man to advance ſuch an aſſertion.

I ſhould now have proceeded to the *fourth* and *laſt* particular, which I propoſed to ſpeak to; namely, to vindicate the reaſonableneſs of this precept of ſelf-denial and ſuffering for Chriſt, which, at firſt appearance, may ſeem to be ſo very harſh and difficult. But this, together with the application of this diſcourſe, ſhall be reſerved to another opportunity.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

SERMON XIII.

Of Self-denial and Suffering for Chriſt's Sake.

MATTH. XVI. 24.

Then ſaid Jeſus unto his Diſciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me.

THEN *ſaid Jeſus to his diſciples*, that is upon occaſion of his former diſcourſe with them, concerning his approaching paſſion, and that he muſt ſhortly go up to *Jeruſalem*, and there ſuffer many things of the *elders* and *chief-prieſts* and *ſcribes*, and at laſt be put to death by them; *then ſaid Jeſus unto his diſciples, if any man will come after me*; that is, if any man will be my diſciple, and undertake the profeſſion of my religion, he muſt do it upon theſe terms of ſelf-denial and ſuffering.

In the handling of theſe words, I proceeded in this method.

Firſt, I conſidered the way which our Saviour here uſeth in making proſelytes, and gaining men over to his religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel men to the profeſſion of it; but fairly propoſeth it to their conſideration and choice, telling them plainly upon what terms they muſt be his diſciples; if they like them, and be reſolved to ſubmit to them, well; if not, 'tis in vain to follow him any longer; for they *cannot be his diſciples*. And to uſe any other way than this to gain men over to religion, is contrary both to the nature of man, who is a reaſonable creature; and to the nature of religion which, if it be not our free choice, cannot be religion.

Secondly, I explained this duty or precept of ſelf-denial, expreſs'd in theſe words, *let him deny himſelf and take up his croſs*; which phraſe of *taking up one's croſs*, is an alluſion to the *Roman* cuſtom, which was, that the malefactor that was to be crucified, was to take up his croſs upon his ſhoulders, and to carry it to the place of execution.

Now for our clearer underſtanding of this precept of ſelf-denial, I told you, that it is not to be extended to every thing that may properly be call'd by that name, but to be limited by the plain ſcope and intendment of our Saviour's diſcourſe; and therefore I did in the

Firſt place remove ſeveral things which are inſtanced in by ſome, as intended and required by this precept. As,

1. That we ſhould deny and renounce our own ſenſes in matters of faith. But this I ſhewed to be abſurd and impoſſible; becauſe if we do not believe what we ſee, or will believe contrary to what we ſee, we deſtroy all certainty, there being no greater than that of ſenſe. Beſides, that the evidence of faith being leſs clear and certain than that of ſenſe, it is contrary to the nature of aſſent, which is always ſway'd and born down by the greateſt and cleareſt evidence. So that we cannot aſſent to any thing in plain contradiction to the evidence of ſenſe.

2. Others would comprehend under this precept, the denying of our reaſon in matters of faith; which is in the next degree of abſurdity to the other; becauſe no man can believe any thing, but upon ſome reaſon or other; and to believe without any reaſon, or againſt reaſon, is to make faith unreaſonable, and infidelity reaſonable.

3. Others pretend, that by virtue of this precept, men ought to be content to renounce their own eternal happineſs, and to be miſerable for ever, for the glory of God, and the ſalvation of their brethren. But this I ſhewed cannot be a duty, for this plain reaſon; becauſe if it were, there is no argument left powerful enough to perſuade a man to it. And as for the two ſcripture inſtances alledged to this purpoſe; *Moſes* his wiſh of being *blotted out of the book of life* for the people of *Iſrael*, ſignifies no more than a temporal death; and St. *Paul*'s of being *accurſed from Chriſt for his brethren*, is

only an hyperbolical expreſſion of his great paſſion and zeal for the ſalvation of his countrymen; as is evident from the form of the expreſſion, ſuch as is commonly uſed to uſher in an hyperbole; *I could wiſh.* And in the

Second place, I ſhewed poſitively, that the plain meaning of this precept of ſelf-denial is this, and nothing but this; that we ſhould be willing to part with all our temporal intereſts and enjoyments, and even life itſelf, for the ſake of Chriſt and his religion. This is *to deny ourſelves.* And then that we ſhould be willing to bear any temporal inconvenience and ſuffering upon the ſame account, this is *to take up our croſs.* And this I ſhewed from the inſtances which our Saviour gives of ſelf-denial, whenever he had occaſion to diſcourſe of it.

Thirdly, I conſidered the ſtrict and indiſpenſable obligation of this precept of ſelf-denial, rather than to forſake Chriſt and his religion. Without this diſpoſition and reſolution of mind we *cannot be his diſciples*; and *if we deny him before men, he will alſo deny us before his Father which is in heaven.* And this confeſſion of him and his truth we are to make before kings and governors, and notwithſtanding their commands to the contrary, which are of no force againſt the laws and commands of God.

Thus far I have gone. There remains only the

Fourth and *laſt* particular, which I propoſed to ſpeak to; *viz.* to vindicate the reaſonableneſs of this ſelf-denial and ſuffering for Chriſt, which at firſt appearance may ſeem to be ſo very difficult. And this precept cannot be thought unreaſonable, if we take into conſideration theſe *three* things.

I. That he, who requires this of us, hath himſelf given us the greateſt example of ſelf-denial that ever was. The greateſt in itſelf, in that he denied himſelf more, and ſuffered more grievous things, than it is poſſible for any of us to do: And ſuch an example as, in the circumſtances of it, is moſt apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it, becauſe all his ſelf-denial and ſufferings were for our ſakes.

II. If we conſider, that he hath promiſed all needful ſupplies of his grace to enable us to the diſcharge of this difficult duty of ſelf-denial and ſuffering, and to ſupport and comfort us therein.

III. He hath aſſured us of a glorious reward of all our ſufferings and ſelf-denial, beyond the proportion of them, both in the degree and duration of it. I ſhall go over theſe as briefly as I can.

I. If we conſider, that he, who requires us thus to deny ourſelves for him, hath given us the greateſt example of ſelf-denial, that ever was. Our Saviour knowing how unwelcome this doctrine of ſelf-denial and ſuffering muſt needs be to his diſciples, and how hardly this precept would go down with them, to ſweeten it a little, and take off the harſhneſs of it, and to prepare their minds the better for it, he tells them firſt of his own ſufferings, that by that means he might, in ſome meaſure, reconcile their minds to it, when they ſaw that he required nothing of them, but what he was ready to undergo himſelf, and to give them the example of it. And upon this occaſion it was, that our Saviour acquaints them with the hard and difficult terms upon which they muſt be his diſciples; *ver.* 21. the Evangeliſt tells us, that *Jeſus began to ſhew unto his diſciples, how that he muſt go unto Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the elders, and chief prieſts, and ſcribes, and be killed. Then ſaid Jeſus unto his diſciples,* that is, immediately upon this diſcourſe of his own ſufferings, as the fitteſt time for it, he takes the opportunity to tell them plainly of their own ſufferings, and that unleſs they were prepared and reſolved to deny themſelves ſo far, as to ſuffer all manner of perſecution for his ſake and the profeſſion of his religion, they could not be his diſciples. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs, and follow me,* that is, let him reckon and reſolve upon following that example of ſelf-denial and ſuffering in which I will go before him. Now the conſideration of this example of ſelf-denial and ſuffering which our Saviour hath given us, hath great force in it to reconcile us to this difficult duty, and to ſhew the reaſonableneſs of it.

1. In that he who requires us thus to deny ourſelves, hath himſelf in his own perſon, given us the greateſt example of ſelf-denial that ever was. And,

2. Such an example as, in all the circumſtances of it, is moſt apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it; becauſe all his ſelf-denial and ſufferings were for our ſakes.

1. He, who requires us thus to deny ourſelves, hath himſelf in his own perſon given us the greateſt example of ſelf-denial that ever was; in that he denied himſelf more, and

ſuffered more grievous things, than any of us can do. He bore the inſupportable load of all the ſins of mankind, and of the wrath and vengeance due to them. *Never was ſorrow like to his ſorrow wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger. He was deſpiſed and rejected of men, a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief; his viſage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the ſons of men. i. e.* He underwent more affliction, and had more contempt poured upon him, than ever was upon any of the ſons of men: And yet he endured all this with incredible patience and meekneſs, with the greateſt evenneſs and conſtancy of mind, and with the moſt perfect ſubmiſſion and reſignation of himſelf to the will of God, that can be imagined.

Such an example as this ſhould be of great force to animate us with the like courage and reſolution, in leſſer dangers and difficulties. To ſee *the Captain of our ſalvation* going before us, and leading us on ſo bravely, and *made perfect by* greater *ſufferings* than we can ever be called to, or are any ways able to undergo, is no ſmall argument and encouragement to us, to *take up our croſs and follow him.* The conſideration of the unknown ſufferings of the Son of God, ſo great as we cannot well conceive of them, ſhould make all the afflictions and ſufferings that can befall us, not only tolerable, but eaſy to us. Upon this conſideration it is, that the Apoſtle animates Chriſtians to patience in their chriſtian courſe, notwithſtanding all the hardſhips and ſufferings that attended it. *Heb.* xii. 2. *Let us run with patience the race which is ſet before us, looking unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith, who endured the croſs and deſpiſed the ſhame. For conſider him, who endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, leſt ye alſo be weary and faint in your minds.*

And this example is more powerful for our encouragement, becauſe therein we ſee the world conquered to our hands, and all the terrors and temptations of it baffled and ſubdued, and thereby a cheap and eaſy victory over it obtained for us. By this conſideration, our Saviour endeavours to inſpire his diſciples with chearfulneſs and courage in this great conflict, *John* xvi. 33. *In the world ye ſhall have tribulation: but be of good chear, I have overcome the world.*

2. This example of our Saviour, is ſuch as, in all the circumſtances of it, is moſt apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it, becauſe, all his ſelf-denial and ſufferings were for our ſakes, in pity and kindneſs to us, and wholly for our benefit and advantage. We are apt to have their example in great regard, from whom we have received great kindneſs and mighty benefits. This pattern of ſelf-denial and ſuffering, which our religion propoſeth to us, is the example of one, whom we have reaſon to eſteem, and love, and imitate, above any perſon in the world. 'Tis the example of our Lord and Maſter, of our Sovereign and our Saviour, of the founder of our religion, and of *the author and finiſher of our faith:* And ſurely ſuch an example muſt needs carry authority with it, and command our imitation. 'Tis the example of our beſt friend and greateſt benefactor; of him, who laid down his life for us, and ſealed his love to us with his deareſt blood, and even when we were bitter enemies to him, did and ſuffered more for us, than any man ever did for his beſt friend. If we ſhould be reduced to poverty and want, let us conſider him, *who being Lord of all, had not where to lay his head; who being rich, for our ſakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.* If it ſhould be our lot to *be perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake*, and exerciſed with ſufferings and reproaches; let us *look unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith, who endured the croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame* for our ſakes. In a word, can we be diſcontented at any condition, or decline it in a good cauſe; when we conſider how contented the Son of God was, in the meaneſt and moſt deſtitute, how meek and patient in the moſt afflicted and ſuffering condition; how he welcomed all events, and was ſo perfectly reſigned to the will of his heavenly Father, that whatever pleaſed God, pleaſed him?

And ſurely in no caſe is example more neceſſary than in this, to engage and encourage us in the diſcharge of ſo difficult a duty, ſo contrary to the bent and inclination of fleſh and blood. A bare precept of ſelf-denial, and a peremptory command to ſacrifice our own wills, our eaſe, our pleaſure, our reputation, yea and life itſelf, to the glory of God, and the maintenance of his truth, would have ſounded very harſh and ſevere, had not the practice of all this been mollified and ſweetened by a pattern of ſo much advantage; by one who in all theſe reſpects denied himſelf, much more than it is poſſible for us to do; by one who might have inſiſted upon a greater right, who abaſed himſelf, and ſtooped from a greater height and dignity; who was not forced into a condition of meanneſs and poverty, but choſe it for our ſakes; who ſubmitted to ſuffering, tho' he had never deſerved it. Here is an example that hath all the argument, and all the encouragement that can be, to the imitation of it.

Such an example is of greater force and authority than any precept or law can be; ſo that well might our Lord, thus going before us, command us to follow him, and ſay, *if any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me.* For if he thus denied himſelf, well may we, who have much leſs to deny, but much more cauſe and reaſon to do it. He did it voluntarily, and of choice; but it is our duty. He did it for our ſakes; we do it for our own. His own goodneſs moved him to deny himſelf for us; but gratitude obligeth us to deny ourſelves in any thing for him. We did not in the leaſt deſerve any thing from him; but he hath wholly merited all this, and infinitely more from us. So that ſuch an example as this is, in all the circumſtances of it, cannot but be very powerful and effectual to oblige us to the imitation of it. But the reaſonableneſs of this precept will yet farther appear if we conſider in the

Third place, That God hath promiſed to all ſincere Chriſtians all needful ſupplies of his grace, to enable them to the diſcharge of this difficult duty of ſelf-denial, and to ſupport and comfort them therein. For the Spirit of Chriſt dwells in all Chriſtians, and the ſame glorious power that raiſed up *Jeſus* from the dead, works mightily in them that believe; *Eph.* i. 19. *That ye may know* (ſaith St. *Paul*, ſpeaking in general to all Chriſtians) *what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Chriſt, when he raiſed him from the dead.* Of ourſelves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world very powerful; but there is a principle reſiding in every true Chriſtian, able to bear us up againſt the world, and the power of all its temptations. *Whatſoever is born of God* (ſaith St. *John*) *overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome; becauſe greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

And this grace and ſtrength was afforded to the firſt Chriſtians in a moſt extraordinary manner, for their comfort and ſupport under ſufferings; ſo that they were *ſtrengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all long-ſuffering with joyfulneſs,* as St. *Paul* prays for the *Coloſſians*, chap. i. 11. And theſe *conſolations of the Spirit of God*, this *joy in the Holy Ghoſt*, was not peculiarly appropriated to the firſt times of chriſtianity; but is ſtill afforded to all ſincere Chriſtians, in ſuch degree as is neceſſary, and convenient for them. And whenever God exerciſeth good men with trials more than human, and ſuch ſufferings, as are beyond the ordinary rate of human ſtrength and patience to bear, he hath promiſed to endue them with more than human courage and reſolution. So St. *Paul* tells the *Corinthians*, 1 Cor. x. 13. *He is faithful,* that hath *promiſed; who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it.* And why ſhould we be daunted at any ſuffering; if God be pleaſed to increaſe our ſtrength, in proportion to the ſharpneſs of our ſufferings?

And bleſſed be God, many of our perſecuted brethren at this day have remarkably found this comfortable aſſiſtance and ſupport; tho' many likewiſe have fallen through fear and weakneſs, as it alſo happened in the primitive times. But where-ever this promiſe is not made good, it is (as I have formerly ſaid) by reaſon of ſome fault and failing on our part. Either men were not ſincere in the profeſſion of the truth, and then, no wonder if *when tribulation and perſecution ariſeth, becauſe of the word, they are offended and fall off.* Or elſe they were too confident of themſelves, and did not ſeek God's grace and aſſiſtance, and rely upon it as they ought; and thereupon God hath left them to themſelves (as he did *Peter*) to convince them of their own frailty and raſh confidence; and yet even in that caſe, when there is truth and ſincerity at the bottom, there is no reaſon to doubt, but that the goodneſs of God is ſuch, as by ſome means or other to give to ſuch perſons (as he did to *Peter*) the opportunity of recovering themſelves by repentance, and a more ſtedfaſt reſolution afterwards.

Fourthly, If we conſider in the *laſt* place, that our Saviour hath aſſured us of a glorious and eternal reward of all our ſelf-denial and ſufferings for him; a reward infinitely beyond the proportion of our ſufferings, both in the degree and duration of it. Now the clear diſcovery of this is peculiarly owing to the chriſtian religion, and the *appearance* *of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who hath aboliſhed death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Goſpel.*

And as our bleſſed Saviour hath aſſured us of this bleſſed ſtate of good men in another world; ſo hath he likewiſe aſſured us that greater degrees of this happineſs ſhall be the portion of thoſe who ſuffer for him and his truth, *Matth.* v. 10, 11, 12. *Bleſſed are they which are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſpeak all manner of evil againſt you falſly, for my names ſake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven.* And nothing ſurely can be more reaſonable, than to part with things of ſmall value, for things of infinitely greater and more conſiderable; to forego the tranſient pleaſures and enjoyments, and the imperfect felicities of this world, for the ſolid and perfect and perpetual happineſs of a better life; and to exchange a ſhort and miſerable life, for eternal life and bleſſedneſs; in a word, to be content to be driven home, to be baniſh'd out of this world into our own native country, and to be violently thruſt out of this *vale of tears*, into thoſe regions of bliſs, where are *joys unſpeakable and full of glory*.

This conſideration St. *Paul* tells us ſupported the primitive Chriſtians under their ſharpeſt and heavieſt ſufferings, 2 *Cor.* iv. 16. *For this cauſe* (ſays he) *we faint not, becauſe our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen, but the things which are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.* So that our ſufferings bear no more proportion to the reward of them, than finite does to infinite, than temporal to eternal, between which there is no proportion.

All that now remains, is to draw ſome uſeful inferences from what hath been diſcourſed, concerning this great and difficult duty of ſelf-denial for the ſake of Chriſt and his religion; and they ſhall be theſe following.

I. To acknowledge the great goodneſs of God to us, that all theſe laws and commands, even the hardeſt and ſevereſt of them, are ſo reaſonable.

God, as he is our maker and gave us our beings, hath an entire and ſovereign right over us, and by virtue of that right might have impoſed very hard things upon us, and this without the giving account to us of any of his matters, and without propounding any reward to us, ſo vaſtly diſproportionable to our obedience to him. But in giving laws to us, he hath not made uſe of this right. The moſt ſevere and rigorous commands of the Goſpel are ſuch, that we ſhall be infinitely gainers by our obedience to them. If we deny ourſelves any thing in this world for Chriſt and his religion, we ſhall, in the next, be conſidered for it to the utmoſt, not only far beyond what it can deſerve, but beyond what we can conceive or imagine; for this periſhing life, and the tranſitory trifles and enjoyments of it, we ſhall receive *a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken, an incorruptible crown which fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens.* For theſe are *faithful ſayings*, and we ſhall find them to be true, *that if we ſuffer with Chriſt we ſhall alſo reign with him; if we be perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, great ſhall our reward be in heaven*; if we part with our temporal life, we ſhall be made partakers of eternal life. He that is firmly perſuaded of the happineſs of the next world, and believes *the glory which ſhall then be revealed*, hath no reaſon to be ſo much offended at the ſufferings of this preſent time, ſo long as he knows and believes, *that theſe light afflictions which are but for a moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

II. Seeing this is required of every Chriſtian, to be always in a preparation and diſpoſition of mind to deny ourſelves, and to take up our croſs; if we do in good earneſt reſolve to be Chriſtians, we ought to ſit down and conſider well with ourſelves, what our religion will coſt us, and whether we be content to come up to the price of it. If we value any thing in this world above Chriſt and his truth, *we are not worthy of him.* If it come to this, that we muſt either renounce him and his religion, or quit our temporal intereſts, if we be not ready to forego theſe, nay, and to part with even life itſelf rather than to forſake him and his truth; *we are not worthy of him.* Theſe are the terms of our chriſtianity, and therefore we are required in baptiſm ſolemnly to renounce the world: And our Saviour, from this very conſideration, infers, that all who take upon them the profeſſion of his religion ſhould conſider ſeriouſly before-hand, and count the coſt of it. *Luke* xiv. 28. *Which of you* (ſays he) *intending to build a tower, ſitteth not down firſt, and counteth the coſt, whether he have ſufficient to finiſh it? Or what king* *going to war with another king, doth not ſit down and conſult, whether with ten thouſand he be able to meet him that cometh againſt him with twenty thouſand. So likewiſe, whoſoever he be, that forſaketh not all he hath, cannot be my diſciple.* You ſee the terms upon which we are Chriſtians; we muſt always be prepared in the reſolution of our minds to deny ourſelves, and take up our croſs, tho' we are not actually put upon this trial.

III. What hath been ſaid is matter of great comfort and encouragement to all thoſe who deny themſelves, and ſuffer upon ſo good an account: Of whom, God knows, there are too great a number at this day, in ſeveral parts of the world; ſome under actual ſufferings, ſuch as cannot but move compaſſion and horror in all that hear of them; others who are fled hither, and into other countries, for refuge and ſhelter from one of the ſharpeſt perſecutions that perhaps ever was, if all the circumſtances of it be duly conſidered. But not to enlarge upon ſo unpleaſant a theme, they who ſuffer for the truth and righteouſneſs ſake, have all the comfort and encouragement, that the beſt example and the greateſt and moſt glorious promiſes of God can give. They have the beſt example in their view; *Jeſus the author and finiſher of their faith, who endured the croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame.* So that how great and terrible ſoever their ſufferings be, they do but tread in the ſteps of the Son of God, and of the beſt and holieſt man that ever was; and he, who is their great example in ſuffering, will likewiſe be their ſupport, and *their exceeding great reward.*

So that tho' ſuffering for Chriſt be accounted great ſelf-denial, and he is graciouſly pleaſed ſo to accept it, becauſe in denying things preſent and ſenſible, for things future and inviſible, we do not only declare our affection to him, but our great faith and confidence in him, by ſhewing that we rely upon his word, and venture all upon the ſecurity which he offers us in another world; yet according to a right eſtimate of things, and to thoſe who *walk by faith and not by ſight*, this which we call ſelf-denial, is, in truth and reality, but a more commendable ſort of ſelf-love; becauſe we do herein moſt effectually conſult, and ſecure, and advance our own happineſs.

IV. And *laſtly*, Since God hath been pleaſed for ſo long a time to excuſe us from this hardeſt part of ſelf-denial, let us not grudge to deny ourſelves in leſſer matters, for the ſake of his truth and religion; to miſs a good place, or to quit it upon that account; much leſs let us think much to renounce our vices, and to thwart our evil inclinations for his ſake. As *Naaman*'s ſervant ſaid to him concerning the means preſcribed by the prophet for his cure, *If he had bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldſt thou not have done it? How much more, when he hath only ſaid, Waſh and be clean?* So ſince God impoſeth no harder terms upon us, than repentance and reformation of our lives, we ſhould gladly and thankfully ſubmit to them.

This, I know, is difficult to ſome, *to mortify their earthly members*, to *crucify the fleſh with the affections and luſts of it*; 'tis like *cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye.* Some are ſo ſtrongly addicted to their luſts and vices, that they could with more eaſe deſpiſe life in many caſes, than thus deny themſelves. But in truth, there is no more of ſelf-denial in it, than a man denies himſelf when he is mortally ſick and wounded, in being content to be cured, and willing to be well. This is not at all to our temporal prejudice and inconvenience, and it directly conduceth to our eternal happineſs; for there is no man that lives a holy and virtuous life, and in obedience to the laws of God, that can lightly receive any prejudice by it in this world. Since God doth not call us to ſuffer, we ſhould do ſo much the more for him. Since he doth not put us to teſtify our love to him by laying down our lives for him, we ſhould ſhew it by a greater care to keep his commandments.

God was pleaſed to exerciſe the firſt Chriſtians with great ſufferings, and to try their love and conſtancy to him and his truth, in a very extraordinary manner, by ſeverity and contempt, by *the ſpoiling of their goods*, and *the loſs of all things*; *by bonds and impriſonments*; *by cruel mockings and ſcourgings*; by the extremity of torments, and by *reſiſting even unto blood*; *by being kill'd for his ſake all the day long, and appointed as ſheep for the ſlaughter.* God was pleaſed to make their way to heaven very ſharp and painful, and to *hedge it in* as it were *with thorns on every ſide*, ſo that they could not, but *through many tribulations, enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Thus we ought all to be in readineſs and reſolution to ſubmit to this duty, if God ſhould think fit at any time of our lives to call us to it. But if he be pleaſed to excuſe us from it, and *to let this cup paſs from us*, (which may lawfully be our earneſt prayer to God, ſince we have ſo good a pattern for it) there will be another duty incumbent upon us, which will take up the whole man, and the whole time of our life, and that is *to ſerve him without fear, in holineſs and righteouſneſs before him all the days of our lives.*

Preached at White-hall *before the Family*, Nov. 1, 1666.

SERMON XIV.

Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon earth.

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

HEB. xi. 13.

And confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The whole verſe runs thus;

Theſe all died in faith, not having received the promiſes, but having ſeen them afar off, and were perſuaded of them, and embraced them, and confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth.

THE Apoſtle having declared at the latter end of the foregoing chapter, that faith is the great principle whereby good men are acted, and whereby they are ſupported under all the evils and ſufferings of this life, verſe 38. *now the juſt ſhall live by faith*; in this chapter he makes it his main buſineſs, to ſet forth to us at large the force and power of faith; and to this purpoſe, he firſt tells us what kind of faith he means, *viz.* a firm perſuaſion of things not preſent and viſible to ſenſe, but inviſible and future; ver. 1. *Now faith* (ſaith he) *is the confident expectation of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not ſeen.* Faith repreſents to us the reality of things which are inviſible to ſenſe, as the exiſtence of God and his providence; and of things which are at a great diſtance from us, as the future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments in another world.

And then he proceeds to ſhew, by particular and famous inſtances, that the firm belief and perſuaſion of theſe things, was the great principle of the piety and virtue of the ſaints, and of good men in all ages of the world; by this *Abel*, and *Enoch*, and *Noah*; *Abraham*, *Iſaac* and *Jacob*; *Joſeph* and *Moſes*, and all the famous heroes of the Old Teſtament, *obtained a good report, and pleaſed God*, and did all thoſe eminent acts of obedience and ſelf-denial which are recorded of them. They *believed the being of God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.* They dreaded his threatnings, and relied upon his promiſes of future and inviſible good things. They lived and died in a full perſuaſion and confidence of the truth of them; tho' they did not live to ſee them actually fulfilled and accompliſhed. *All theſe* (ſaith he, ſpeaking of thoſe eminent ſaints which he had inſtanced in before) *died in faith, not having received the promiſes, but having ſeen them afar off, and were perſuaded of them, and embraced them.* This is ſpoken with a more particular regard to *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*, to whom the promiſes of the conqueſt and poſſeſſion of a fruitful land, were made, and of a numerous offſpring, among whom ſhould be the Meſſias, in whom all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed.

Theſe promiſes they did not live to ſee accompliſhed and made good in their days; but they heartily believed them, and rejoiced in the hope and expectation of them as if they had embraced them in their arms, and been put into the actual poſſeſſion of them: *And they confeſſed that they were pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth.*

This ſaying and acknowledgment more particularly and immediately refers to thoſe ſayings of the patriarchs *Abraham* and *Jacob*, which we find recorded, *Gen.* xxiii. 4. where *Abraham* ſays to the ſons of *Heth*, *I am a ſtranger and a ſojourner with you:* And *Gen.* xlvii. 9. where *Jacob* ſays to *Pharaoh*, *the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.*

Theſe good men were *ſtrangers and ſojourners* in a land which was promiſed to be theirs afterwards. They dwelt in it themſelves as *ſtrangers*, but were in expectation that it would one day become the inheritance of their poſterity.

Now in this, as by a type and ſhadow, the Apoſtle repreſents to us the condition of good men, while they are paſſing through this world. They are *pilgrims and ſtrangers in the earth*; they travel up and down the world for a time, as the patriarchs did in the land of *Canaan*; but are in expectation of a better and more ſettled condition hereafter; *they deſire a better country, that is, an heavenly*, ſays the Apoſtle at the 16th verſe of this chapter.

That which I deſign from theſe words, is to repreſent to us our preſent condition in this world, and to awaken us to a due ſenſe and ſerious conſideration of it. It is the ſame condition that all the ſaints and holy men that are gone before us were in, in this world; and every one of us may ſay with *David*, Pſal. xxxix. 12. *I am a ſtranger with thee, and a ſojourner as all my Fathers were.* It is a condition very troubleſome and very unſettled, ſuch as that of *pilgrims and ſtrangers* uſeth to be. This we muſt all acknowledge, if we judge rightly of our preſent ſtate and condition. *They confeſſed, that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth*; but yet it was not without the hope and expectation of a better and happier condition in reverſion. So it follows juſt after; *they that ſay ſuch things*, (that is *that confeſs themſelves to be ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth*) *declare plainly, that they ſeek a country.*

This bore up the patriarchs under all the evils and troubles of their pilgrimage, that they expected an inheritance, and a quiet and ſettled poſſeſſion of that good land which God had promiſed to them. Anſwerably to which, good men do expect, after *the few and evil days of their pilgrimage* in this world are over, a bleſſed inheritance in a *better country, that is, an heavenly*; and with bleſſed *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, they *look for a city which hath foundations, whoſe builder and maker is God*, as it is ſaid of that good patriarch at the tenth verſe of this chapter.

It is very frequent not only in ſcripture, but in other authors, to repreſent our condition in this world, by that of pilgrims and ſojourners in a foreign country: For the mind, which is the man, and our immortal ſouls, which are by far the moſt noble and excellent part of ourſelves, are the natives of heaven, and but *pilgrims and ſtrangers* here in the earth; and when the days of our pilgrimage ſhall be over, are deſigned to return to that *heavenly country* from which they came, and to which they belong. And therefore the Apoſtle tells us, *Phil.* iii. 20. that Chriſtians have relation to heaven, as their native place and country, Ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, *our converſation is in heaven*, ſo we render the words; but they properly ſignify, that Chriſtians are members of that city and ſociety which is above; and tho' they converſe at preſent here below, while they are paſſing through this world, yet heaven is the country to which they do belong, and whither they are continually tending, *ſedes ubi fata quietas oſtendunt*, where a quiet habitation, and a perpetual reſt is deſigned and prepared for them. This acknowledgment *David* makes concerning himſelf, and all the people of God, 1 *Chron.* xxix. 15. *For we are ſtrangers before thee, and ſojourners, as were all our fathers. Our days on the earth are as a ſhadow, and there is none abiding.* So likewiſe St. *Peter*, 1 Pet. i. 17. *Paſs the time of your ſojourning here in fear*; and chap. ii. ver. 11. *Dearly beloved, I beſeech you as ſtrangers and pilgrims, abſtain from fleſhly luſts.*

And not only the inſpired writers of holy ſcripture, but heathen authors, do frequently make uſe of this alluſion. *Plato* tells us, it was a common ſaying, and almoſt in every man's mouth, παρεπιδημία τις ἐστὶν ὁ βίος, the life of man is a kind of pilgrimage. And *Tully*, in his excellent diſcourſe *de ſenectute*, (concerning old age) brings in *Cato* deſcribing our paſſage out of this world, not as a departure from our home, but like a man leaving his inn, in which he hath lodged for a night or two, *ex vita iſta diſcedo tanquam ex hoſpitio, non tanquam ex domo*; *commorandi enim natura diverſorium nobis, non habitandi dedit:* "When I leave this world (ſays he) I look upon myſelf as departing out of an inn, and not as quitting mine own home and habitation; nature having aſſigned this world to us as a place to ſojourn, but not to dwell in." Which is the ſame with what the Apoſtle ſays in the text, concerning the patriarchs, *they confeſſed that they were pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth*; and concerning all Chriſtians, chap. xiii. 14. *Here we have no continuing city*; *but we ſeek one to come.*

But I do not intend to follow the metaphor too cloſe, and to vex and torture it by, purſuing all thoſe little parallels and ſimilitudes, which a lively fancy might make or find, betwixt the condition of ſtrangers and pilgrims, and the life of man during his abode and paſſage through this world. I will inſiſt only upon *two* things, which ſeem plainly to be deſigned and intended by this metaphor, and they are theſe;

I. That our condition in this world is very troubleſome and unſettled; *they confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

II. It implies a tendency to a future ſettling, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we ſhall enter when we go out of this world. For ſo it follows in the very next words after the text; *they confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth: For they that ſay ſuch things declare plainly that they ſeek a country. They that ſay ſuch things*; that is, they that acknowledge themſelves to have lived in ſuch a reſtleſs and uncertain condition in this world, travelling from one place to another, as the patriarchs *Abraham*, *Iſaac* and *Jacob* did, and yet pretend to be perſuaded of the goodneſs of God, and the faithfulneſs of his promiſe, in which he ſolemnly declared himſelf to be their God, do hereby plainly ſhew, that they expect ſome happier condition hereafter, wherein that great promiſe of God will be made good to them to the full.

And theſe are two very weighty and uſeful conſiderations, that we ſhould both underſtand our preſent condition in this world, and our future hope and expectation after our departure out of it, that ſo we may demean ourſelves ſuitably to both theſe conditions; both as it is fit for thoſe who look upon themſelves *as pilgrims and ſojourners* in this world, and likewiſe as it becomes thoſe who *ſeek and expect a better country*, and hope to be made partakers of a bleſſed immortality in another world. I ſhall briefly ſpeak to both theſe; and then ſhew, what effect and influence the ſerious meditation of theſe *two* points ought to have upon every one of us.

I. That our condition in this world is very troubleſome and unſettled. This I take to be principally intended in the metaphor of *ſtrangers and pilgrims.* Such was the life of the patriarchs, which is here ſpoken of in the text; they had no conſtant abode and fix'd habitation, but were continually wandering from one kingdom and country to another; in which travels they were expoſed to a great many hazards and dangers, afflictions and miſeries, affronts and injuries, as we read at large in the hiſtory of their travels in the Old Teſtament. And ſuch is our condition in this world; it is often troubleſome, and always uncertain and unſettled.

'Tis often very troubleſome: Not to inſiſt upon the weak condition of infancy and childhood, the helpleſneſs of that ſtate, and inſufficiency of it for its own preſervation, and the ſupply of its natural wants and neceſſities: Not to mention the dangerous vanity and deſperate folly of youth, nor the infirmities and contempts, the many tedious and weariſome days and nights that old age is commonly grieved and afflicted withal, to that degree, as to make life not only unpleaſant, but almoſt an intolerable burden to us. Not to dwell upon theſe, which yet take up and poſſeſs a great ſhare and portion of our lives: If we look upon man in his beſt ſtate, we ſhall find him, as *David* hath long ſince pronounced on him, to be *altogether vanity.* We need not go a pilgrimage, and travel into remote countries, to make life more troubleſome and uneaſy. In what part of the world ſoever we are, even that which we improperly call our own home and native country, we ſhall meet with trouble and inconvenience enough to convince us, that we are but *ſtrangers* in it. More eſpecially good men are peculiarly liable to a great many evils and ſufferings, upon account of their piety and virtue. *They are not of the world* (as our bleſſed Saviour tells his diſciples, *John* xv. 19.) and *becauſe they are not of the world, therefore the world hateth them*, and taketh all opportunities and occaſions to vex and perſecute them in one kind or other, either by doing all manner of evil to them, or by ſpeaking all manner of evil of them.

But ſuppoſe we eſcape trouble upon this account, there are abundance of common and natural inconveniencies, which render human life very uneaſy. For either we muſt live alone, or in the company and ſociety of others: One of theſe two is neceſſary and unavoidable. Suppoſe we would live alone; how few are there that can enjoy themſelves tolerably alone for any conſiderable time? For though there be a great deal too much of ſelf-love in mankind, and men are generally extremely fond of themſelves; yet I know not how it happens (though ſo it is) that very few men in the world care for their own company, or can endure, for any conſiderable time, to converſe only with themſelves; nay, for the moſt part, they are ſooner glutted with themſelves, and ſurfeited of their own converſation, than with the worſt company they can meet with; a ſhrewd ſign, as one would think, that they knew ſomething worſe by themſelves than of any body elſe, or at leaſt they know it more certainly. It is a wiſe and deep ſaying of *Ariſtotle*, *whoever affects to be alone, muſt be* ἢ Θεὸς, ἢ θηρίον, *either a god or a wild beaſt*; either he muſt be ſufficient for himſelf, and want nothing; or of ſo wild and ſavage a diſpoſition, as to deſtroy every thing that is weaker, and to run away from every thing that is ſtronger than himſelf. Now man is neither good enough to be contented and ſatisfied with himſelf, nor bad enough to hate and avoid every body elſe; and therefore he muſt enter into ſociety, and keep company with other men.

And if we go abroad into the world, and try the converſation of men, it cannot but grieve us to ſee a great many things, which yet we muſt ſee every day; the cenſoriouſneſs, and uncharitableneſs, and inſincerity of men one towards another; to ſee with what kindneſs they will treat one another to the face, and how hardly they will uſe them behind their backs. If there were nothing elſe, this one naughty quality, ſo common and reigning among mankind, were enough to make an honeſt and true-hearted man, one that loves plainneſs and ſincerity, to be heartily ſick of the world, and glad to ſteal off the ſtage, where there is nothing native and ſincere, but all perſonated and acted; where the converſation of a great part of men is all deſigning and inſidious, full of flattery and falſhood, of good words and ill offices: *One ſpeaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth; but in his heart he lieth in wait*, as it is in the Prophet, *Jer.* ix. 8. And when a man hath done all the good turns he can, and endeavoured to oblige every man, and not only to live inoffenſively, but exemplarily; he is fairly dealt withal, and comes off upon good terms, if he can but eſcape the ill words of men for doing well, and obtain a pardon for thoſe things which truly deſerve praiſe.

But ſetting aſide theſe, and the like melancholy conſiderations; when we are in the health and vigour of our age, when our blood is warm, and our ſpirits quick, and the humours of our body not yet turned and ſoured by great diſappointments, and grievous loſſes of our eſtates, or neareſt friends and relations, by a long courſe of afflictions, by many croſs events and calamitous accidents; yet we are continually liable to all theſe; and the perpetual fear and danger of them is no ſmall trouble and uneaſineſs to our minds, and does in a great meaſure rob us of the comfort, and eat out the pleaſure and ſweetneſs of all our enjoyments; and, by degrees, the evils we fear overtake us; and as one affliction and trouble goes off, another ſucceeds in the place of it, like *Job*'s meſſengers, whoſe bad tidings and reports of calamitous accidents came ſo thick upon him, that they overtook one another.

If we have a plentiful fortune, we are apt to abuſe it to intemperance and luxury; and this naturally breeds bodily pains and diſeaſes, which take away all the comfort and enjoyment of a great eſtate. If we have health, it may be we are afflicted with loſſes or deprived of friends, or croſſed in our intereſts and deſigns, and one thing or other happens to impede or interrupt the contentment and happineſs of our lives. Sometimes an unexpected ſtorm, or ſome other ſudden calamity, ſweepeth away, in an inſtant, all that which with ſo much induſtry and care we have been gathering many years. Or if an eſtate ſtand firm, our children are taken away, to whoſe comfort and advantage all the pains and endeavours of our lives were devoted. Or if none of theſe happen (as it is very rare to eſcape moſt, or ſome of them) yet for a demonſtration to us that God intended this world to be uneaſy, to convince us that a perfect ſtate of happineſs is not to be had here below, we often ſee in experience that thoſe who ſeem to be in a condition as happy as this world can put them into, by the greateſt accommodations towards it, are yet as far or farther from happineſs, as thoſe who are deſtitute of moſt of thoſe things wherein the greateſt felicity of this world is thought to conſiſt. Many times it ſo happens, that they who have all the furniture and requiſites, all the materials and ingredients of a worldly felicity at their command, and in their power, yet have not the ſkill and ability out of all theſe to frame a happy condition of life to themſelves. They have health, and friends, and reputation, and eſtate in abundance, and all outward accommodations that heart can wiſh; and yet in the midſt of all theſe circumſtances of outward felicity, they are uneaſy in their minds, and as the wiſe man expreſſeth it, *in their ſufficiency they are in ſtraits*, and are as it were ſurfeited even with happineſs itſelf, and do ſo fantaſtically and unaccountably nauſeate the good condition they are in, that tho' they want nothing to make them happy, yet they cannot think themſelves ſo; though they have nothing in the world to moleſt and diſguſt them, yet they can make a ſhift to create as much trouble to themſelves, out of nothing, as they who have the real and ſubſtantial cauſes of diſcontent.

Which plainly ſhews, that we are not to look for happineſs here; 'tis not to be found in this land of the living; and after our enquiries after it, we ſhall ſee ſufficient reaſon to take up *Solomon*'s concluſion, that *all is vanity and vexation of ſpirit*; which is much the ſame with that aphoriſm of *David* his father, which I mentioned before, that *man in his beſt eſtate is altogether vanity.*

But what happineſs ſoever our condition in this world is capable of, 'tis moſt aſſuredly full of uncertainty and unſettlement; we cannot enjoy it long, and every moment we are in danger of being deprived of it. Whatever degree of earthly felicity we are poſſeſſed of, we have no ſecurity that it ſhall continue. There is nothing in this world, but when we are as ſure of it as this world can make us, may be taken away from us by a thouſand accidents. But ſuppoſe it to abide and continue; we ourſelves ſhall be taken away from it: We muſt die, and *in that very day* all our enjoyments and hopes, as to this world, will *periſh* with us; for here is no abiding place, *we have no continuing city*; ſo that it is in vain to deſign a happineſs to ourſelves in this world, when we are not to ſtay in it, but only travel and paſs through it.

And this is the *Firſt*, our condition in this world is very troubleſome and unſettled.

II. Our condition in this world being a ſtate of pilgrimage, doth imply a tendency to future ſettlement and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition hereafter. And ſo the Apoſtle reaſons immediately after the text; *they confeſſed that they were pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth*; *for they that ſay ſuch things, declare plainly that they ſeek a country*; that is, they who acknowledge themſelves to be *pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth*, and yet withal profeſs to be perſuaded of the goodneſs of God and the fidelity of his promiſe, *do plainly declare that they ſeek* another *country*. This is ſpoken of *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*, who acknowledged themſelves to be *ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth*; and thereby *declared that they ſought another country*. Now, ſays the Apoſtle, this cannot be the country from whence they firſt came, *Ur* of the *Chaldees*, ver. 15. *And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had an opportunity of returning thither.* And therefore he concludes, that the country which they ſought was a better country than any in this world, ver. 16. *But now they deſire a better country*; *that is, an heavenly. Therefore God is not aſhamed to be called their God*; *for he hath prepared for them a city.* This plainly refers to that famous declaration or promiſe of God to the patriarchs of being their God; *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob.* Now certainly this promiſe of God did ſignify ſome very great bleſſing and advantage to thoſe faithful ſervants of God above others. This was not made good to them in this world; for *they confeſſed that they were pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth.* Where then is the bleſſing ſpoken of and ſignified by the great words of that promiſe that *God was their God?* They met with no ſuch condition in this world, as was anſwerable to the greatneſs of that promiſe. From hence the Apoſtle argues, that they had a firm perſuaſion of a future happineſs; *For they that ſay ſuch things declare plainly, that they ſeek a better country*; *that is, an heavenly. Wherefore God is not aſhamed to be called their God, ſince he hath prepared for them a city.* And tho' the promiſe of God to *Abraham* did immediately deſign the land of *Canaan*, and the earthly *Jeruſalem*; yet the Apoſtle extends it to that which was typified by it; *viz. an heavenly country*, the *Jeruſalem which is above*, which at the 10th verſe of this chapter, is called *a city which hath foundations, whoſe builder and maker is God.* And now, ſeeing God hath deſigned and prepared ſo great a happineſs for them in another world, well might he be called *their God*, notwithſtanding that they were *ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth*; that is, tho' the full meaning and importance of this promiſe was not made good to them in this world, yet it was accompliſh'd to the full in the happineſs which was deſigned for them in another life. *And God* need *not be aſhamed to be called their God*; implying, that if nothing had been meant by it beyond this world, this promiſe, of God's being *their God*, would have fallen ſhamefully ſhort of what it ſeemed to import. And this I conceive to be the true reaſon why our Saviour lays ſo much weight upon this promiſe, as to pitch upon it for the proof of the reſurrection; that is, of a future ſtate of happineſs in another world.

There are many conſiderations apt to perſuade good men of another life after this; as, that mankind is generally poſſeſſed with this hope and perſuaſion; and that the more wiſe and virtuous men have been, the more plainly have they apprehended the hopes of immortality, and the better have they been contented to leave this world, as if, ſeeing farther than other men, they had a clearer proſpect of the happineſs they were entring upon: But above all, that God hath made our condition in this world ſo troubleſome and unſettled, as if he had deſigned on purpoſe to make us ſeek for happineſs elſewhere, and to elevate and raiſe our minds to the hopes and expectation of a condition better and more durable, than any that is to be met with in this world; which, conſidering the goodneſs of God, and his gracious providence and care of good men, is a thing of itſelf extremely credible.

Having thus, as briefly as I could, diſpatched the *two* particulars which I propounded to ſpeak to for the explication of the text, I ſhould now ſhew what influence theſe conſiderations ought to have upon our lives and practice.

And if this be our condition in this world, and theſe our hopes and expectations, as to another life; if we be *pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth*; and *look for a better country, that is, an heavenly*; this ought to have a great influence upon us in theſe following reſpects, which I ſhall at preſent but very briefly mention.

1. Let us intangle and incumber ourſelves as little as we can in this our pilgrimage; let us not engage our affections too far in the pleaſures and advantages of this world; for we are not to continue and ſettle in it, but to paſs through it. A little will ſerve for our paſſage and accommodation in this journey; and beyond that, why ſhould we ſo earneſtly covet and ſeek more?

2. If we be *pilgrims and ſtrangers*; then it concerns us to behave ourſelves blameleſly and inoffenſively, remembring, that the eyes of people are upon us, and that thoſe among whom we live will be very curious and obſervant of our manners and carriage.

3. Let us be chearful and patient under the troubles and afflictions of this preſent life. They who are in a ſtrange country, muſt expect to encounter many injuries and affronts, and to be put to great difficulties and hazards, which we ſhould endeavour to bear with that chearfulneſs, as men that are upon a journey uſe to bear foul ways and bad weather, and inconvenient lodging and accommodations.

4. The conſideration of our preſent condition and future hopes ſhould ſet us above the fondneſs of life, and the ſlaviſh fear of death. For our minds will never be raiſed to their true pitch and height, till we have in ſome good meaſure conquered theſe two paſſions, and made them ſubject to our reaſon. As for this preſent life, and the enjoyments of it, what do we ſee in them, that ſhould make us ſo ſtrangely to dote upon them? *Quæ lucis miſeris tam dira cupido?* This world, at the beſt, is but a very indifferent place; and he is the wiſeſt man that bears himſelf towards it with the moſt indifferent affection; that is always willing to leave it, and yet patient to ſtay in it as long as God pleaſes.

5. We ſhould always prefer our duty and a good conſcience before all the world; becauſe it is in truth more valuable, if our ſouls be immortal, and do ſurvive in another world. For (as our Saviour argues) *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? Or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* And thus St. *Paul* reaſoned with himſelf from the belief of *a reſurrection of the juſt and unjuſt. For this cauſe* (ſaith he) *I exerciſe myſelf alway to have a conſcience void of offence both toward God and toward man.*

Laſtly, If we be ſojourners and travellers, we ſhould often think of our end, and carefully mind the way to it. Our end is everlaſting happineſs; and the way to it is a conſtant and ſincere and univerſal obedience to the commandments of God. When the young man in the Goſpel enquired of our Saviour the way to eternal happineſs, ſaying, *Good maſter, what good thing ſhall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?* His anſwer to him was, *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* We may eaſily miſtake our way; for *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it.* Therefore we ſhould often pray to God, as *David* does, *Pſalm* cxix. 19. *I am a ſtranger in the earth, hide not thy commandments from me.* And *Pſalm* cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and ſee if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlaſting.*

The ſecond Sermon on this Text

SERMON XV.

Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth.

HEB. xi. 13.

And confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The whole verſe runs thus;

Theſe all died in faith, not having received the promiſes, but having ſeen them afar off, and were perſuaded of them, and embraced them, and confeſſed that they were ſtrangers and pilgrims on the earth.

I Have lately in this place (upon a particular day and occaſion) begun to handle theſe words; I ſhall briefly give you the heads of what hath been already delivered, and proceed to what remains. And that which I deſigned from this text was, to repreſent to us our preſent condition in this world, and to awaken our minds to a due ſenſe and conſideration of it. It is the ſame condition that all the ſaints and holy men that have gone before us were in, in this world; and we may all of us ſay with *David, Pſal.* xxxix. 12. *I am a ſtranger with thee, and a ſojourner, as all my fathers were.*

It is very frequent not only in ſcripture, but in other authors, to repreſent our condition in this world, by that of *pilgrims and ſojourners* in a far country. For the mind, which is the man, and our immortal ſouls, which are by far the more noble and excellent part of ourſelves, are the natives of heaven, and but *pilgrims and ſtrangers* here on the earth; and when the days of our pilgrimage ſhall be accompliſhed, are deſigned to return to that *heavenly country* from which they came, and to which they belong. And for the explication of this metaphor, I inſiſted only upon two things, which ſeem plainly to be deſigned and intended by it.

I. That our condition in this world is very troubleſome and unſettled; *They confeſſed that they were pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth.*

II. It implies a tendency to a future ſettlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we ſhall enter when we go out of this world.

And theſe I told you are two very weighty and uſeful conſiderations; that we ſhould both underſtand our preſent condition in this world, and our future hopes and expectation after our departure out of it; that ſo we may demean ourſelves ſuitably to both theſe conditions; both as is fit for thoſe who look on themſelves as *pilgrims and ſojourners* in this world; and likewiſe as it becomes thoſe who *ſeek and expect a better country*, and hope to be partakers of a bleſſed immortality in another world.

I. That our condition in this world is very troubleſome and unſettled; and this is principally intended by the metaphor of *pilgrims and ſtrangers.* Such was the life of the patriarchs here ſpoken of in the text; they had no conſtant abode and fix'd habitation, but were continually wandering from one kingdom and country to another; in which travels they were expoſed to a great many dangers and ſufferings, affronts and injuries; as we read at large in the hiſtory of their travels in the Old Teſtament. And ſuch is our condition in this world; it is often troubleſome, and always uncertain, and unſettled; ſo that whatever degree of worldly felicity any man is poſſeſt of, he hath no ſecurity that it ſhall continue for one moment.

II. Our condition in this world being a ſtate of pilgrimage, it implies a tendency to a future ſettlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we ſhall enter ſo ſoon as we leave this world. For ſo it follows immediately after the text; *They confeſſed that they were pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth; For they that ſay ſuch things, declare plainly that they ſeek a country. They that ſay ſuch things;* that is, they that acknowledge themſelves to have lived in ſuch a reſtleſs and uncertain condition in this world, travelling from one place to another, as the Patriarchs *Abraham, Iſaac,*

Iſaac, and *Jacob* did; and yet pretend to be perſuaded of the goodneſs of God, and the faithfulneſs of his promiſe, in which he ſo ſolemnly declares himſelf to be *their God*; do hereby plainly ſhew, that they expect ſome happier condition hereafter, wherein that great promiſe of God will be made good to them to the full; ſo that he need *not be aſhamed to have been called their God.*

Having handled at large theſe *two* particulars, I come now to ſhew what influence the conſideration of them ought to have upon our lives and practices. And if this be our condition in this world, and theſe our hopes and expectations as to another life; if we be *pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth, and look for a better country*, that is, an *heavenly*; this ought to have a great influence upon us in theſe following reſpects, which I did but briefly mention before, but ſhall now proſecute and preſs more largely.

I. Let us intangle and incumber ourſelves as little as we can in this our pilgrimage: Let us not engage our affections too far in the pleaſures and advantages of this world, becauſe we are not to ſtay in it, but to paſs through it. Upon this conſideration, the Apoſtle St. *Peter* doth ſo earneſtly exhort Chriſtians to preſerve themſelves from fleſhly luſts, 1 *Pet.* ii. 11. *Dearly beloved, I beſeech you, as ſtrangers and pilgrims, to abſtain from fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul.* The gratifying of our inordinate luſts, and our carnal and ſenſual inclinations, is directly oppoſite both to the nature of our immortal ſpirits, and to their great deſign and buſineſs in this world. Fleſhly luſts do not only pollute and defile, but even quench and extinguiſh our diviner part, and do work the ruin and deſtruction of it; they ſink our affections into the mud and filth of this world, and do intangle and detain them there; in a word, they do wholly indiſpoſe and unfit us for that pure, and ſpiritual, and divine life, which alone can qualify us for our heavenly country and inheritance. And therefore while our ſouls are ſojourning in this world, we ſhould abſtain from them, and preſerve ourſelves unſpotted and untainted by them, as being altogether unuſeful, and perfectly contrary to the laws and manners of our heavenly country. If we wallow in brutiſh and filthy luſts, as we paſs through this world; our native country, when our ſouls think to return to it, will reject us and caſt us out: When we come to heaven's gate, and knock there, expecting to be admitted, and ſhall cry, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*; He will bid us *to depart from him, becauſe we have been workers of iniquity. Nothing that is unclean* can *enter* into heaven. He who is to receive us into thoſe bleſſed manſions, hath declared it to be his immutable reſolution and decree, that *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* And therefore as ever we hope to ſee God in that happy and bliſsful ſtate, we muſt *cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God*; that having render'd ourſelves as like him as we can in this world, we may be capable of the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him in the other.

And as for the advantages in this world, let us not purſue them too eagerly, we may take the conveniences which fairly offer themſelves to us, and be content to want what we cannot honeſtly have, and without going out of the way of our duty, conſidering that we are travellers, and that a little will ſerve for our paſſage and accommodation in our pilgrimage. And beyond that why ſhould we ſo earneſtly covet more, and trouble ourſelves for that which is not neceſſary to our journey, why ſhould we at any time deal unjuſtly to attain any of this world's goods? They will ſtand us in ſtead for ſo little a while, that we can have no temptation to injure or oppreſs any man, to break the peace of our conſciences, and to wound our ſouls for the attaining of them. If the providence of God offer them to us, and bring them to our hands, in the uſe of honeſt diligence and lawful means; as we are not to refuſe them, ſo neither are we to ſet our hearts upon them, not to ſuffer our affections to be intangled in them.

The wiſeſt uſe we can make of them, will be, to do like thoſe who traffick in foreign parts, to conſign our eſtates into our own native country, to ſend our treaſures before us into the other world, that we may have the benefit of them when we come there. And this we may do by alms and charity. Whatever we ſpend upon the fleſh, we leave behind us, and it will turn to no account to us in our own country: But whatever we lay out for the relief of the poor, is ſo much treaſure laid out and ſecured to ourſelves againſt another day. So our bleſſed Saviour aſſures us, *Luke* xii. 33. That *giving of alms is providing for ourſelves bags that wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens that faileth not.*

II. If we be *pilgrims* and *ſtrangers*, then it concerns us to behave ourſelves with great caution, and to live blameleſly and inoffenſively; remembring that the eyes of people are upon us, and that thoſe among whom we ſojourn, will be very prying and curious, and narrow obſervers of our manners and carriage. They that are in a ſtrange country, are not wont to take that liberty and freedom which the natives of the place may do, but to keep a perpetual guard upon themſelves, knowing how ſtrictly they are obſerved, and that they live among thoſe who bear no good-will to them, and that every bad thing we do, reflects upon our nation, and is a reproach to the country to which we belong. *Ye are not of the world* (ſays our Lord) *if ye were of the world, the world would love its own: But ye are not of the world; therefore the world hateth you.* Upon this account the Apoſtle chargeth Chriſtians to be *harmleſs* and *blameleſs*, and *as it becomes the Sons of God to be, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation, among whom we* ſhould *ſhine as lights.* The ſame argument St. *Peter* uſeth, 1 *Pet.* ii. 11, 12. *I beſeech you, as pilgrims and ſtrangers, to abſtain from fleſhly luſts, having your converſation honeſt among the Gentiles*; that is, conſidering that you are among ſtrangers and enemies, and therefore ought to be very careful to bring no ſcandal upon your holy profeſſion, among thoſe who will be ready to take all advantages againſt you. Particularly, we, who pretend to the ſame heavenly country, muſt be kind to one another, and whilſt we live among ſtrangers, have no quarrels amongſt ourſelves. In a ſtrange country, it uſeth to be a mighty endearment of men to one another, that they are of the ſame country and fellow-citizens, and this alone is commonly ſufficient to unite their affections, and link their intereſts together. But how little of this is to be ſeen among Chriſtians! How ſhamefully do they quarrel among themſelves, in the midſt of enemies and ſtrangers! as if they had no relation to one another, and never expected to meet at laſt in the ſame country, and there to live together for ever.

III. Let us be as patient and chearful as we can, under all the troubles and afflictions which we meet with in this life. They who are in ſtrange countries, muſt expect to encounter many injuries and affronts, and to be put to great difficulties and hardſhips. Thoſe which are lighter and more tolerable, we muſt bear with chearfulneſs. Upon a journey men uſe to put on all the pleaſantneſs they can, and to make ſport of all the inconveniencies of the ways and weather, and little croſs accidents that befal them: And thus, if we had but the art and wiſdom to do it, many of the leſſer inconveniencies of human life might well enough be play'd off, and made matter rather of mirth and diverſion, than of melancholy and ſerious trouble.

But there are ſome evils and calamities of human life, that are too heavy and ſerious to be jeſted withal, and require the greateſt conſideration, and a very great degree of patience to ſupport us under them, and enable us to bear them decently; as the loſs of friends and deareſt relations; as the loſs of an only ſon, grown up to be well fix'd and ſettled in a virtuous courſe, and promiſing all the comfort to his parents that they themſelves can wiſh: Theſe certainly are ſome of the greateſt evils of this world, and hardeſt to be born. For men may pretend what they will to philoſophy, and contempt of the world, and of the periſhing comforts and enjoyments of it; to the extirpation of their paſſions, and an inſenſibility of theſe things, which the weaker and undiſciplin'd part of mankind keep ſuch a wailing and lamentation about: But when all is done, nature hath framed us as we are, and hath planted in our nature ſtrong inclinations and affections to our friends and relations; and theſe affections are as naturally moved upon ſuch occaſions, and pluck every ſtring of our hearts as violently, as extreme hunger and thirſt do gnaw upon our ſtomachs.

And therefore it is fooliſh for any man to pretend to love things mightily, and to rejoice greatly in the enjoyment of them; and yet to be ſo eaſily contented to loſe them, and to be parted from them. This is to ſeparate things which nature hath ſtrongly linked together. Whatever we mightily love, does thereby, in ſome ſort, become part of ourſelves, and it cannot hang looſe to us, to be ſeparated and divorced from us without trouble; no more than a limb, that is vitally and by ſtrong ligaments united to the body, can be dropt off when we pleaſe, or rent from the body without pain. And whoever pretends to have a mighty affection for any thing, and yet at the ſame time does pretend that he can contentedly, and without any great ſenſe or ſignification of pain, bear the loſs of it, does not talk like a philoſopher, but like an hypocrite; and under a grave pretence of being wiſe, is in truth an ill-natur'd man. For moſt certainly, in proportion to our love of any thing, will be our trouble and grief for the loſs of it.

So that under theſe great and heavier ſtrokes, we had need both of faith and patience. And indeed, nothing but the firm belief of *a better country, that is, an heavenly*, of another life after this, and a bleſſed immortality in another world, is ſufficient to ſupport a man in the *few and evil days of his pilgrimage*, and to ſuſtain his ſpirit under the great evils and calamities of this life. But this fully anſwers all, *that the afflictions and ſufferings of this preſent time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which ſhall be revealed in us.* Nay, that if we bear theſe afflictions patiently, and with a due ſubmiſſion to the will of God (eſpecially our ſufferings for his truth and cauſe) it will certainly increaſe our happineſs in the other world, and *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

IV. The conſideration of our preſent condition, and of our future hopes, ſhould ſet us above the fondneſs of life, and the ſlaviſh fears of death. For our minds will never be raiſed to their true pitch and height, till we have in ſome good meaſure conquered theſe two paſſions, and made them ſubject to our reaſon.

As for this preſent life, and the enjoyment of it, what is it that we ſee in them, that ſhould make us ſo ſtrangely to dote upon them? *Quæ lucis miſeris tam dira cupido!* This world at the beſt is but a very indifferent place, and he is the wiſeſt man, that bears himſelf towards it with the moſt indifferent mind and affection; that is always willing to leave it, and yet patient to ſtay in it as long as God pleaſeth. And as for death, tho' the dread of it be natural, yet why ſhould the terrors of it be ſo very ſurpriſing and amazing to us, after we have conſider'd, that to a good and pious ſoul, it is no other but the gate of heaven, and an entrance into eternal life? We are apt to wonder, to ſee a man undaunted at the approach of death, and to be not only contented, but chearful at the thoughts of his departure out of this world, this ſink of ſin, and vale of miſery and ſorrow. Whereas if all things be duly conſidered, it is a greater wonder that men are ſo patient to live, and that they are not glad of any fair excuſe and opportunity of getting out of this ſtrange country, and retiring home, and of ridding themſelves of the troubles and inconveniences of life. For, conſidering the numerous troubles and calamities we are liable to in a long pilgrimage, there are really but *three* conſiderations that I can readily think of, that can make this world, and our preſent condition in it, in any good meaſure tolerable to a wiſe man; *viz.* that God governs the world; that we are not always to ſtay in it; that there is a happineſs deſigned and reſerved for us in another place, which will abundantly recompenſe and make amends to us for all the troubles and ſufferings of this life.

And yet it is ſtrange to ſee how faſt moſt men cling to life; and that even in old age, how they catch at every twig that may but hold them up a little while; and how fondly they hanker after a miſerable life, when there is nothing more of pleaſure to be enjoyed, nothing more of ſatisfaction to be expected and hoped for in it. When they are juſt putting into the port, and one would think, ſhould rejoice at their very hearts that they ſee land; yet how glad would they be then of any croſs wind, that would carry them back into the ſea again, as if they loved to be toſs'd, and were fond of ſtorms and tempeſts.

Nay, the very beſt of us, even after we have made that acknowledgment of *David*, *I am a ſtranger and a ſojourner with thee, as all my fathers were*, are apt with him, to be ſtill importuning God for a little longer life; *O ſpare me a little, that I may recover ſtrength, before I go hence, and be no more.* And when God hath granted us this requeſt, then we would be *ſpared* yet *a little longer.*

But let us remember, that God did not deſign us to continue always in this world; and that he hath on purpoſe made it ſo uneaſy to us, to make us willing to leave it; and that ſo long as we linger here below, we are detained from our happineſs; *while we are preſent in the body, we are abſent from the Lord.* This conſideration made St. *Paul* ſo *deſirous to be diſſolved*, becauſe *he knew, that when his earthly houſe of this tabernacle was diſſolved, he ſhould have a much better habitation, a building of God, an houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* This was that which made him ſo full of joy and triumph, at the thoughts of his leaving the world: 2 *Tim.* iv. 6. *I am now ready* (ſays he) *to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which God the righteous judge ſhall give me in that day.*

Nay, the conſideration of this (tho' but obſcurely apprehended by them) did raiſe the ſpirits of the wiſer and better heathen, and fill them with great joy and comfort at the thoughts of their diſſolution. With what conſtancy and evenneſs of mind did *Socrates* receive the ſentence of death! and with what excellent diſcourſe did he entertain his friends juſt before he drank off the fatal cup, and after he had taken it down, whilſt death was gradually ſeizing upon him! One can hardly, without a very ſenſible tranſport, read *Cato*'s diſcourſe concerning his death, as it is repreſented by *Tully* in his book of old age. *I am* (ſays he) *tranſported with a deſire of ſeeing my forefathers, thoſe excellent perſons, of whom I have heard, and read, and written; and now I am going to them, I would not willingly be drawn back into this world again.* Quod ſi quis Deus mihi largiatur, ut ex hac ætate repuereſcam, & in cunis vagiam, valde recuſem. *If ſome God would offer me, at this age, to be a child again, and to cry in the cradle, I would earneſtly refuſe it, and upon no terms accept it. And now that my race is almoſt run, and my courſe juſt finiſh'd, how loth ſhould I be to be brought back, and made to begin again? For what advantage is there in life? Nay rather, what labour and trouble is there not in it? But let the benefit of it be what it will, there is certainly ſome meaſure of life, as well as of other things, and men ought to know when they have enough of it.* O præclarum diem, cum in illud animorum concilium cœtumque proficiſcar, & cum ex hac turbâ & colluvione diſcedam: *O bleſſed and glorious day, when I ſhall go to that great council and aſſembly of ſpirits, and have got out of this crowd and rabble!* And if a heathen, who had but ſome obſcure glimmerings of another life, and of the bleſſed ſtate of departed ſouls, could ſpeak thus chearfully of death; how much more may we, who have a clear and undoubted revelation of theſe things, and to whom *life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel.*

V. We ſhould always prefer our duty, and the keeping of a good conſcience, before all the world; becauſe it is, in truth, infinitely more valuable, if ſo be our ſouls be immortal, and do ſurvive in another world, and we muſt there give a ſtrict account of all the actions done by us in this life, and receive the ſentence of eternal happineſs or miſery, *according to the things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil.* For as our Saviour argues concerning the caſe of denying him and his truth, to avoid temporal ſuffering and death; *What is a man profited, if he ſhall gain the whole world and loſe his own ſoul? Or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* When we are tempted by temporal intereſt and advantage, or by the fear of preſent loſs and ſuffering, to deny or diſſemble our religion, to do any thing that is ſinful in any kind, and contrary to our duty and conſcience, let us ask ourſelves, what will be the profit and advantage of it? what, if for fear of men, and what they can do to me, I incur the wrath and diſpleaſure of Almighty God? This is infinitely more to be dreaded; and his frowns are a thouſand times more terrible, than the bittereſt wrath and cruelleſt malice of men. What, if to preſerve this frail and mortal body, I ſhall evidently hazard the loſs of my immortal ſoul; and to eſcape a temporal inconvenience, I forfeit everlaſting happineſs, and plunge myſelf into eternal miſery and ruin? would not this be a wild bargain and a mad exchange, for any temporal gain and advantage to loſe the things that are eternal? and for the pleaſing of ourſelves for a little while, to make ourſelves miſerable for ever?

If we confeſs ourſelves to be *pilgrims and ſtrangers on the earth*, and are perſuaded of the promiſes of God concerning an *heavenly country*, where we hope to arrive after the *few and evil days of our pilgrimage* are over; let us not, by complying with the humours of ſtrangers, and the vitious cuſtoms and practices of an evil world, bar ourſelves of our hopes, and baniſh ourſelves from that happy place, to which we all profeſs we are going.

We pretend to be travelling towards heaven: But if we *make ſhipwreck of faith and a good conſcience*, we deſtroy our own hopes of ever arriving at that happy port. We do not live up to our expectation of a future happineſs; if the unſeen glories of another world do not raiſe us above all the temptations and terrors of ſenſe. Our faith and hope have not their due and proper influence upon us, if they do not govern our lives and actions; and make us ſtedfaſt in the profeſſion of our holy religion, and in the conſcientious practice of it. St. *Paul* reaſon'd himſelf into this holy reſolution, from the hopes of a bleſſed reſurrection, *Acts* xxiv. 15, 16. *I have hope*, ſays he, *towards God, that there ſhall be a reſurrection of the dead, both of the juſt and unjuſt*; ἐν τούτῳ δὲ, *for this cauſe therefore, I exerciſe myſelf always to have a conſcience void of offence towards God, and towards men.*

VI. And *laſtly*, If we be *ſojourners* and *travellers* in this world, we ſhould often think of our end, and carefully mind the way to it. Our end is everlaſting happineſs, and the direct way to it is by a conſtant and ſincere and univerſal obedience to the laws and commandments of God. And this itſelf is ſo plain a way, that a ſincere and honeſt man can hardly err in it. And therefore we muſt not ſuffer ourſelves to be led and trained out of it, upon any pretence whatſoever; not by the wildfire of pretended illuminations and enthuſiaſms; nor by the confident pretence of an infallible guide, that will needs ſhew us another way, and perſuade us to follow him blindfold in it. Let us not quit *the infallible rule of God's word*, to follow any *guide* whatſoever. *If an Apoſtle or an Angel from heaven, preach any other doctrine* and way to heaven, *let him be accurſed.* He who *is the way, and the truth, and the life,* when he was conſulted with about the way to eternal happineſs, knew no other but this. For when the young man ask'd him; *Good maſter, what good things ſhall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?* His anſwer was, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* 'Tis true indeed, that by reaſon of our corrupt inclinations within, and powerful temptations without, this way (eſpecially at our firſt ſetting out) is rugged and difficult. So our Lord hath forewarned us, telling us, that *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life*, and that *there be few that find it*; therefore we ſhould *ſtrive to enter in,* take great care and pains to diſcern the right way, and to overcome the difficulties of our firſt entrance into it; and ſhould often pray to God as *David* did, *Pſal.* cxix. 19. *I am a ſtranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me; Pſal.* cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and ſee if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlaſting.*

Thus, if we would always have our end in our eye; it would both be a direction to us in our way, and an encouragement to quicken our pace in it; there being no more powerful motive to a good life, than to be aſſured, that, *If we have our fruit unto holineſs, our end ſhall be everlaſting life.*

SERMON XVI.

The Preſence of the Meſſias, the Glory of the Second Temple.

HAGGAI ii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

For thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry-land: And I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come, and I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of hoſts. The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of hoſts. The glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the Lord of hoſts; and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of hoſts.

THE author of this prophecy was the firſt of the three prophets, which God ſent to the people of *Iſrael* after the captivity; and this prophecy contains ſeveral meſſages from God, to the princes, and elders, and people of *Iſrael*, in which he reproves their ſlackneſs and negligence in the building of the temple, and encourageth them thereto, by the promiſe of his aſſiſtance; and tells them, that however in reſpect of the magnificence of the building, and the rich ornaments of it, it ſhould be incomparably ſhort of *Solomon*'s temple (which ſome that were then alive had ſeen in its glory) yet in other reſpects it ſhould far excel it: for the time would come, that this ſecond temple ſhould be graced with the preſence of the *Meſſias*, which would be a greater glory to it, than all the riches of *Solomon*'s temple.

And this is fully expreſſed in the words which I have read unto you, *Thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, yet once it is a little while, and I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land: And I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come, and I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of hoſts. The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of hoſts. The glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the Lord of hoſts; and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of hoſts.*

Now, that it is ſome very great thing which is here foretold and promiſed, for the honour of this ſecond temple, no man can doubt that conſiders in what a ſolemn manner it is here expreſſed; this great and glorious title, *the Lord of hoſts*, being no leſs than five ſeveral times uſed within the compaſs of theſe four verſes; the like inſtance whereto is not, perhaps, in the whole Bible; *Thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, yet once it is a little while, and I will ſhake the heavens and the earth*, ver. 6. *And I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of hoſts*, ver. 7. *The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of hoſts*, ver. 8. And twice ver. 9. *The glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the Lord of hoſts; and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of hoſts.* So that by the ſolemn manner of expreſſing it, we may imagine, that it is ſome very great thing which is ſpoken of, and ſuch as the like had never been before; and ſuch was *the incarnation and coming of the Meſſias.*

I know that the modern *Jews* will by no means have this text to be underſtood of the *Meſſias*, and not without cauſe; for he that is ſpoken of in the text, was to come into the ſecond temple, which hath now been deſtroyed above 1600 years ago; and they do not believe the *Meſſias* to be yet come; and therefore whatever ſhift they make, they muſt interpret this text, of ſome other perſon than the *Meſſias:* But then it is plain for what reaſon they do ſo, it being evident from their own *Talmud*, that the ancient *Jews* did underſtand it of the *Meſſias*; but being hardened in their unbelief, they pervert all thoſe texts whereby they might be convinced, that *Jeſus* our bleſſed Saviour was the true *Meſſias.*

And indeed, whoever carefully conſiders the ſeveral expreſſions and circumſtances of this prediction, cannot underſtand it of any other. To make this evident I ſhall explain the ſeveral expreſſions in the text, *thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, yet once, it is a little while. Yet a little while*, ſo it is in the *Hebrew. Yet once more*, ſo the LXX render it, and ſo it is quoted from the LXX in the New Teſtament, *Heb.* xii. 26. and this ſenſe the *Hebrew* word may likewiſe bear, and our tranſlation of the text takes them both in, *yet once it is a little while.*

If we take the words in the firſt ſenſe, *yet a little while*, they ſignify, that God was then beginning thoſe changes in the world, which were to precede and make way for the coming of the *Meſſias.* This indeed was not till about four hundred years after; but a great while before that time God began thoſe changes in the world, which were to prepare the way for his coming; and conſidering the long time which was paſt from the firſt promiſe made to *Abraham*, four hundred years in compariſon of that may ſeem but a little while. But I rather chooſe the latter ſenſe of this phraſe, *yet once more*; becauſe the *Hebrew* will bear it, and becauſe it is ſo quoted in the New Teſtament; as if the prophet had ſaid, that God had before done a great thing in the world, and accompanied with great miracles; *viz. the giving of the law by Moſes*, which was attended with great commotions, both in *Egypt*, by bringing the people of *Iſrael* out from thence with a mighty hand, and by deſtroying the nations before them, whoſe land God gave them for a poſſeſſion; but now he would do one greater thing more, *the ſending of the Meſſias*, and the *planting his religion in the world*; in order whereunto there ſhould be much greater, and more univerſal commotions and changes in the world, and more and greater miracles wrought; *yet once more, and I will ſhake the heavens and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land, and I will ſhake all nations.* From which words the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* argues the aboliſhing of the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation, and the bringing in of another that ſhould be unalterable, *Heb.* xii. 27. *And this word yet once more* (ſays the Apoſtle) *ſignifies the removing of thoſe things that are ſhaken, that thoſe things which cannot be ſhaken may remain.* And this I ſhall have occaſion to explain more fully in the following parts of this diſcourſe.

Yet once more I will ſhake the heavens and the earth, &c. For the underſtanding whereof we are to conſider that the *Hebrews* have no one word whereby to expreſs *the*

the world, and therefore they do it by an enumeration of the principal parts of it. So *Gen.* I. when *Moſes* would expreſs the creation of the world, he ſays, *in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* And ſo St. *Peter*, when he would expreſs the revolution of all things, after the univerſal conflagration of the world, calls it, *a new heaven and a new earth*, 2 Pet. iii. 13. *Neverthelesſ we, according to his promiſe, look for new heavens, and a new earth*; that is a new world, a quite other frame and ſtate of things, than that which we now ſee. And ſo the Prophet here in the text to expreſs the great commotions and changes that ſhould be in the world before the coming of the *Meſſias*, ſays, that God *will ſhake the heavens and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land*; that is he would cauſe great revolutions in the world; there ſhould be great wars and confuſions, and the empires of the world ſhould paſs from one hand to another. And thus we find this expreſſion interpreted, ver. 21, 22. of this chapter, *I will ſhake the heavens and the earth, and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will deſtroy the ſtrength of the kingdoms of the nations.* And to ſhew that by *ſhaking the heavens and the earth*, is meant great changes in the world, and as it were an univerſal commotion of it, he adds in the text, by way of farther explication, *and I will ſhake all nations.*

And then it follows, *and the deſire of all nations ſhall come.* This we (as the ancient *Jews* alſo did) take to be a plain character and deſcription of the *Meſſias*, he is *the deſire of all nations*; he whom all nations had reaſon to deſire, becauſe of thoſe great bleſſings and benefits which he was to bring to the world. Thus interpreters generally underſtand theſe words, and it is very true the *Meſſias* was ſo: but this does not ſeem to be the true importance of this phraſe; for the *Hebrew* word ſignifies *expectation* as well as *deſire*, and ſo I ſhould rather chooſe to render it, *the expectation of all nations ſhall come*; which ſignifies, that about the time of the coming of the *Meſſias*, not only the *Jews*, but other nations, ſhould be in a general expectation of ſome *great prince* then to appear; which was moſt eminently accompliſhed in our bleſſed Saviour, as I ſhall ſhew by and by.

And I will fill this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of hoſts, ſpeaking of the ſecond temple, which was then in building, which though it fell very much ſhort of *Solomon*'s in point of ſtate and magnificence; yet by being honoured with the preſence of the *Meſſias*, it ſhould be much more glorious than *Solomon*'s temple. *The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of hoſts*; not that God wanted the command of gold and ſilver, to have made the ſecond temple equal to *Solomon*'s in outward glory and ſpendor; he could eaſily have made it ſo in that reſpect; and *Joſephus* tells us, that not long before the time of our Saviour's coming, *Herod* had built and beautified it to that degree, that in ſome reſpects it excelled *Solomon*'s; and of this ſome underſtand the next words, *the glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater, than of the former*; namely, that this was accompliſhed in that beauty and magnificence which was added to it, when it was re-edified by *Herod* the great: But however that be, this is certain, that it was much more glorious in another reſpect, namely, that it entertained the *Meſſias*, *the great expectation and bleſſing of all nations.*

And in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of hoſts. Some underſtand this, of that univerſal peace which was throughout the world, when our Saviour was born in the reign of *Auguſtus Cæſar.* Others with great probability interpret this of the *Meſſias* himſelf, who is called here by the name of *peace*; and ſo ſome of the ancient *Jews* underſtood it; *in this place will I give peace*, that is, *the Meſſias.* For the *Hebrew* word ſignifies all kind of happineſs, and ſo it includes all thoſe bleſſings and benefits, that happineſs and ſalvation which the *Meſſias* brought to the world. And this will appear very probable, if we conſider, how frequently in ſcripture this title is given to the *Meſſias.* *Iſai.* ix. 6. he is called *the prince of peace*; and *Zach.* ix. 10. it is ſaid of him, *that he ſhould ſpeak peace to the nations*; and the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* parallels him with *Melchiſedech* in this particular, *that he was king of Salem*, that is, *king of peace*; and which is very little different from this, he is frequently in ſcripture called *ſalvation*, which ſignifies the happineſs of being reſcued and delivered from all kind of evil; as *peace* ſignifies all kind of good, *Iſa.* xlix. 6. *I will alſo give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayſt be my ſalvation to the end of the earth:* And *Luke* ii. 30. When *Simeon* had our bleſſed Saviour in his arms, when he was firſt brought into the temple, he calls him *the ſalvation of God*; *mine eyes* (ſaith he to God) *have ſeen thy ſalvation*; and *John* iv. 22. *Salvation is* *of the Jews*, that is, the *Meſſias* was to be of that nation. But which is more expreſs, Chrtſt is called *our peace*, *Eph.* ii. 14. Nay, he is expreſly called *peace* or *the peace*, Micah v. 5. *And this man* (ſpeaking of the *Meſſias*) *ſhall be the peace*, that is one of his names or titles ſhall be *peace*. So that I make little doubt, but that in this expreſſion in the text, of *giving peace*, is meant, giving the *Meſſias*; and that this is render'd as the reaſon, why the glory of the ſecond temple, ſhould be greater than of the firſt, becauſe in that place the *Meſſias* ſhould appear, and remarkably ſhew himſelf. God could have given this ſecond temple, if he had thought fit, as much outward glory and beauty as that of *Solomon*'s building; for *ſilver and gold are his*, and all the riches of the world are at his command; but he choſe to put a far greater honour upon it than that of ſilver and gold, and to make it much more glorious in another reſpect, *the glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former*; *becauſe in this place I will give the Meſſias, the peace*, and happineſs, and ſalvation of mankind, and incomparably the greateſt bleſſing that ever was given to the world.

The words being thus explained, it will now be more eaſy to ſhew how the ſeveral parts of this prediction do agree to *our bleſſed Saviour*, and to no other.

I. That there ſhould be great changes and commotions in the world before his coming; *I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and the ſea and the dry land, and I will ſhake all nations*; and then he ſhould come.

II. That about the time of his coming, the world ſhould be in general expectation of him; *and the expectation of all nations ſhall come.*

III. That he ſhould come during the continuance of the ſecond temple; for it was his coming that ſhould fill that houſe with glory, and in that place the *Meſſias*, who is called *peace*, is promiſed to be given; *and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of hoſts.*

IV. That this coming of the *Meſſias* ſhould be the laſt diſpenſation of God for the ſalvation of men, and conſequently ſhould be perpetual and unalterable; *yet once more, and I will ſhake the heavens and the earth, yet once more*, from whence the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* argues, that the Goſpel ſhould be a perpetual and unalterable diſpenſation. Of theſe I ſhall ſpeak ſeverally, and as briefly as I can.

I. Here is a prediction of great changes and commotions in the world before the coming of the *Meſſias*; *thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, I will ſhake the heavens and the earth, and the ſea and the dry land, and I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come*; plainly ſignifying hereby, that before the coming of the *Meſſias* (who is here called *the deſire and expectation of all nations*) there ſhould be very great commotions and changes in the world, that the empire of the world ſhould be overturned; for ſo I have told you, that this expreſſion of *ſhaking the heavens and the earth* is explained, ver. 21. of this chapter, *I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth, and will overthrow the throne of kingdoms.* And this was fulfilled in a moſt remarkable manner, between the time of this prophecy, and the coming of our bleſſed Saviour, during which time (though it was but four hundred years) there happened greater commotions, and much more conſiderable revolutions, in the great kingdoms of the world, than had done in above two thouſand years before, and in almoſt one thouſand ſeven hundred years ſince; ſo that it is no wonder, that the prediction of theſe things is by God himſelf expreſſed in ſo very ſolemn a manner, as I obſerved before.

At the time of this prophecy, the empire of the world was newly tranſlated from the *Aſſyrians* to the *Medes* and *Perſians*; and not long after, the *Grecians* under *Alexander* the *Great* quite overthrew the *Perſian* empire, and that by as ſudden a change as was ever perhaps made in the world, poſſeſſing themſelves by ſo ſwift and ſpeedy a conqueſt of a great part of the then known world, as if to paſs through it, and to conquer it, had been all one.

After the death of *Alexander*, the empire of the *Grecians* was ſhared among his great captains, whom the *Romans* by degrees conquered, beſides a great many other kingdoms which *Alexander* never ſaw and ſome of them perhaps had never heard of. And at laſt the empire of the world, in all its greatneſs and glory was poſſeſſed by *Auguſtus*, in whoſe time our bleſſed Saviour was born.

So that here were mighty commotions in the world, wonderful changes of kingdoms and empires, before the coming of the *Meſſias*; far greater, and of much larger extent, than thoſe that were in *Egypt* and *Paleſtine*, at the bringing of the children of *Iſrael* out of *Egypt*, and the giving of the law from mount *Sinai*. And theſe did not only go before the coming of the *Meſſias*, but they made way for the more eaſy propagating of his doctrine and religion; for the *Grecians*, and eſpecially the *Romans*, ſettled their conqueſts in ſuch a manner, as in a good meaſure to propagate their language among the nations which they conquer'd; and particularly the *Romans* did make the ways for travel and commerce much more eaſy and commodious than ever they were before, by employing their armies, when they had no other work, to make high-ways, for the convenience of paſſage from the ſtation of one legion to another; the benefit and effect whereof, we in *England* enjoy to this day; (a pattern to all princes and ſtates that have neceſſary occaſion for armies how to employ them:) And this very thing proved afterwards a mighty advantage for the more eaſy and ſpeedy ſpreading of chriſtianity in the world.

II. Another part of this prophecy is, that about the time of the coming of the *Meſſias*, the world ſhould be in a general expectation of him; *and the expectation of all nations ſhall come:* And I doubt not but this character of the *Meſſias* is taken out of that famous prophecy concerning him, *Gen.* xlix. 10. *The ſcepter ſhall not depart from Judah till Shiloh come*, (and by *Shiloh*, the ancient *Jews* generally underſtood the *Meſſias*) and *to him ſhall the gathering of the people be*; or as it is render'd by the *Septuagint*, and ſeveral other tranſlations, *and he ſhall be the expectation of the nations.* In alluſion to which ancient prophecy concerning him, he is here in the text called, *The expectation of all nations*; and ſo by the prophet *Malachi*, chap. iii. ver. 1. *And the Lord whom ye expect*, or look for, *ſhall ſuddenly come into his temple.* Now this part of the prediction in the text, was moſt eminently fulfilled in our bleſſed Saviour. For about the time of his coming, the *Jews* were in a general expectation of him, as appears not only from that ancient and general tradition of theirs, from the ſchool of *Elias*, *that at the end of the ſecond two thouſand years of the world the Meſſias ſhould come*; (and our bleſſed Saviour's coming did accordingly happen at that time;) but likewiſe from that particular computation of the *Jewiſh* doctors, not long before our Saviour's coming, who upon a ſolemn debate of the matter, did determine that the *Meſſias* would come within fifty years. And this is farther confirmed, from the great jealouſy which *Herod* had concerning *a King of the Jews*, that was expected to be born about that time; and from that remarkable teſtimony in *Joſephus*, who tells us, *That the* Jews *rebelled againſt the* Romans, *being encouraged thereto by a famous prophecy in their ſcriptures, That about that time a great Prince ſhould be born among them, that ſhould rule the world:* And *Joſephus* flatter'd *Veſpaſian* ſo far as to make him believe that he was the man; and thereupon perſuaded him to deſtroy the line of *David*, out of which the tradition was, that the *Meſſias* ſhould ſpring; as if the accompliſhment of a divine prediction could be hinder'd by any human endeavour.

And this was not only the general expectation of the *Jews* about that time, but of a great part of the world; as appears from thoſe two famous teſtimonies of two of the moſt eminent *Roman* hiſtorians, *Suetonius* and *Tacitus.* The words of *Suetonius* are theſe; *Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus & conſtans opinio, eſſe in fatis, ut Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur: There was an ancient and general opinion, famous throughout all the eaſtern parts, that the fates had determined that there ſhould come out of* Judea *thoſe that ſhould govern the world*; and he adds what I quoted before out of *Joſephus, Id Judæi ad ſe trahentes rebellârunt*; *That the* Jews *taking this to themſelves, did thereupon rebel.* Now it is very remarkable, that the very words of this tradition ſeem to be a verbal tranſlation of that prophecy in *Micah*, *that out of Judah ſhould come the governor: Ut Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur.* The other teſtimony is out of *Tacitus*; and his words are theſe, (*lib.* 21. §. 13.) *Pluribus perſuaſio inerat antiquis ſacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipſo tempore fore, ut valeſceret oriens, profectique Judæâ rerum potirentur: A great many* (ſays he) *were poſſeſſed with a perſuaſion that it was contained in the ancient books of the prieſts, that at that very time the eaſt ſhould prevail, and that they who ſhould govern the world, were to come out of* Judea. By the *ancient books of the prieſts*, he in all probability means *the ancient prophecies of ſcripture*; for the laſt expreſſion is the ſame with that of *Suetonius*, taken out of the prophet *Micah*; and the other, *that the eaſt ſhould prevail*, does plainly refer to that title given to the *Meſſias* by the prophet *Zachary*, chap. vi. 12. where he is called *the man whoſe name is* צמח, which ſignifies *Oriens* and *Germen*, both the *eaſt* and *a branch*; our tranſlation hath it, *the man whoſe name is the branch*; but it might as well be render'd, *the man whoſe name is* *the eaſt.* Thus you ſee this character of our Saviour in this prophecy moſt literally fulfilled, that he was *the expectation of all nations.* I proceed to the

IIId Circumſtance of this prediction, That he who is here foretold, ſhould come during the continuance of this ſecond temple; becauſe it was his preſence that ſhould *fill that houſe with glory*; and it was *in that place* that the *Meſſias*, who is called *the peace*, is promiſed *to be given*; *and in this place will I give peace, ſaith the Lord of hoſts.* And this is likewiſe moſt expreſly foretold by the prophet *Malachi*, chap. iii. 1. *Behold I will ſend my meſſenger, and he ſhall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye look for, ſhall ſuddenly come into his temple; even the meſſenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold he ſhall come, ſaith the Lord of hoſts:* And accordingly *Jeſus*, our bleſſed Saviour, came during the ſecond temple; he was preſented there by his parents, and owned by *Simeon* for the *Meſſias*; he diſputed there and taught frequently there, and by his preſence *filled that houſe with glory.* For that the ſon of God taught publickly there, was a greater honour to it, than all the ſilver and gold of *Solomon*'s temple.

And not long after his death (according to his expreſs prediction) this ſecond temple was deſtroyed to the ground; *ſo that not one ſtone of it was left upon another.* And when, ſome hundred years after, it was attempted to be rebuilt three ſeveral times, the laſt whereof was by *Julian* the apoſtate, in oppoſition to chriſtianity, and to our Saviour's prediction; fire came out of the foundation, and deſtroyed the workmen; ſo that they deſiſted in great terror, and durſt never attempt it afterwards. And this not only the chriſtian writers of that age, in great numbers, do teſtify, but *Ammianus Marcellinus* (a heathen hiſtorian who lived in that time) does alſo give us a very particular account of this memorable matter. So that if by *the expectation of the nations* be here meant the *Meſſias* (as I have plainly ſhewn) then he is long ſince come, and was no other than *Jeſus*, our bleſſed Saviour, who, according to this prophecy, was *to fill the ſecond temple with glory*; which hath now been demoliſhed above one thouſand ſix hundred years ago, and the rebuilding whereof hath been ſo often and ſo remarkably hindred from heaven. The conſideration of all which were ſufficient to convince the *Jews* of their vain expectation of a *Meſſias* yet to come, were they not ſo obſtinately rooted and fixed in their infidelity. There remains now the

IV. And laſt circumſtance of this prophecy, *viz.* That the coming of the *Meſſias* was to be the laſt diſpenſation of God, for the ſalvation of men, and conſequently, was to be perpetual and unchangeable: *Yet once more, and I will ſhake the heavens and the earth, and the ſea, and the dry land: And I will ſhake all nations, and the expectation of all nations ſhall come. Yet once more*; from which words the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* argues the perpetuity of the Goſpel, and that it was the diſpenſation which ſhould never be changed. *Heb.* xii. 27. *And this word, yet once more, ſignifies, the removing of thoſe things which are ſhaken, as of things that are made, that thoſe things which cannot be ſhaken may remain.* And then it follows, *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved,* &c. It was uſual with the *Jews* to deſcribe the times of the Goſpel, by *the kingdom of the Meſſias*; and accordingly the Apoſtle here calls the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, *a kingdom which cannot be moved:* In oppoſition to the law, which was an imperfect and alterable diſpenſation. For this is plainly the ſcope of the Apoſtle's reaſoning; namely to convince the *Jews* that they were now under a more gracious and perfect diſpenſation than that of the law, ver. 18. *Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire*; meaning mount *Sinai*, which was a ſenſible literal mountain, *a mountain that might be touched*, in oppoſition to the myſtical and ſpiritual mount *Sion*, by which the diſpenſation of the Goſpel is deſcribed: Which by the way, prevents the objection of its being called *the mountain that might be touch'd*, when it was forbidden to be touch'd upon pain of death; *Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched*; that is, I am not now ſpeaking of a literal and ſenſible mountain, ſuch as was mount *Sinai*, from whence the law was given; but of that ſpiritual and heavenly diſpenſation of the Goſpel, which was typify'd by mount *Sion* and by *Jeruſalem*; *but ye are come to mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jeruſalem, and to Jeſus the mediator of the new covenant.* And then he cautions them to take heed how they reject him that came from heaven, to make this laſt revelation of God to the world, which becauſe of the clearneſs and perfection of it, ſhould never need to receive any change, ver. 25. *See that ye refuſe not him that ſpeaketh, for if they eſcaped not,*

not, who refuſed him that ſpake on the earth, (viz. *Moſes,* who delivered the law from mount *Sinai) much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven*; *whoſe voice then ſhook the earth,* (alluding to the earthquake at the giving of the law) *but now he hath promiſed, ſaying, yet once more, I ſhake not the earth only, but alſo heaven*; that is, *the whole world,* in order to the coming of the *Meſſias,* and the planting of the goſpel in the world: and then he argues from the words *once more,* that the former diſpenſation ſhould be removed, to make way for that which ſhould perpetually remain.

And indeed there is no need of any farther revelation after this; nor of any change of that religion which was brought from heaven by the Son of God; becauſe of the perfection of it, and its fitneſs to reform the world, and to recover mankind out of their lapſed and degenerate condition, and to bring them to happineſs; both by the purity of its doctrine and the power of its arguments, to work upon the minds of men, by the clear diſcovery of the mighty rewards and puniſhments of another world.

And now the proper inference from all this diſcourſe, is the very ſame with that which the Apoſtle makes, from the conſideration of the perfection and excellency of this revelation, which God hath made to the world by his Son. *See that ye refuſe not him that ſpeaketh*; *for how ſhall we eſcape, if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven?* And at the 28th verſe of that chapter, *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may ſerve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear*; that is, let us live as becomes thoſe to whom God hath made ſo clear and perfect a revelation of his will. We have all the advantages of the divine revelation which the world ever had, and the laſt and moſt perfect that the world ever ſhall have: We have not only *Moſes and the prophets,* but that doctrine which *the Son of God* came down from heaven on purpoſe to declare to the world; God hath vouchſafed to us that clear and compleat revelation of his will, which he denied to *many prophets and righteous men, who deſired to ſee the things which we ſee, but could not ſee them, and to hear the things which we hear, but could not hear them.* There were good men in the world under thoſe imperfect revelations which God made to them; but we have far greater advantages, and more powerful arguments to be good than ever they had. And as we ought thankfully to acknowledge theſe bleſſed advantages; ſo ought we likewiſe, with the greateſt care and diligence to improve them.

And now how does the ſerious conſideration of this condemn all impenitent ſinners under the Goſpel, who will not be reclaimed from their ſins, and perſuaded to goodneſs, by all that God can do; by the moſt plain declaration of his will to the world, by the moſt perfect precepts and directions for a good life; by the moſt encouraging promiſes to obedience, and by the moſt ſevere threatnings of an eternal and unutterable ruin, in caſe of diſobedience; *by the wrath of God, revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men*; by the terrors of the great day, and the vengeance of eternal fire; by the wonderful and amazing condeſcenſion of the Son of God, appearing in our nature; by his merciful undertaking for the redemption of loſt and ſinful man; by his cruel ſufferings for our ſins, and by the kindeſt offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and by the glorious hopes of eternal life.

What could God have done more for us, than he hath done? What greater concernment could he ſhew for our ſalvation, than *to ſend his own Son, his only Son, to ſeek and ſave us?* And what greater demonſtration could he give of his love to us, than *to give the Son of his Love to die for us?* This is the laſt effort that the divine mercy and goodneſs will make upon mankind. So the Apoſtle tells us in the beginning of this epiſtle, chap. i. 1. that *God who at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake in times paſt unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken to us by his Son:* And if we will not hear him, he will ſpeak no more; after this it is not to be expected that he ſhould make any farther attempts for our recovery, he can ſend no greater and dearer perſon to us than *his own Son.* If we deſpiſe him, whom will we reverence? if we reject him, and the great ſalvation which he brings and offers to us, we have all the reaſon in the world to believe that our caſe is deſperate, and that we ſhall *die in our ſins. This* was *the condemnation of the Jews,* that *they did not receive and believe on him whom God had ſent.* And if we who profeſs to believe on him, and to receive his doctrine, be found diſobedient to it, in our lives, we have reaſon to fear that our condemnation will be far heavier than theirs: For ſince the appearance of *the Son of God* for the ſalvation of men, *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men,* eſpecially againſt thoſe *who detain the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs*; that is, againſt thoſe who entertain the light of God's truth in their minds, but do not ſuffer it to have its proper effect and influence upon their hearts and lives; and make that a priſoner which would make them free. So our Lord tells us, that *the truth ſhall make us free*; but if after *we have received the knowledge of the truth* we are ſtill *the ſervants of ſin*; our condemnation is much worſe, than if *the Son of God* had never come: For the chriſtian religion hath done nothing, if it do not take men off from their ſins, and teach them to live well.

Eſpecially at *this time,* when we are celebrating *the coming of the Son of God, to deſtroy the works of the devil,* we ſhould take great heed, that we be not found guilty of any impiety or wickedneſs; becauſe this is directly contrary to the main deſign *of the grace of God which brings ſalvation, and hath appeared to all men* (and the appearance whereof we do at *this time* commemorate) for that *teacheth men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godlily in this preſent world:* And we cannot gratify the devil more, than by ſhewing ourſelves more diligent than ordinary to uphold his works, at *this very time,* when *the Son of God was manifeſted* on purpoſe *to diſſolve them*: We cannot poſſibly chooſe a worſe, a more improper ſeaſon to ſin in, than when we are. celebrating the birth of the bleſſed *Jeſus,* who came *to ſave us from our ſins.* This is, as if a ſick man, for joy that a famous phyſician is come to his houſe, ſhould run into all manner of exceſs, and ſo do all he can to inflame his diſeaſe, and make his caſe deſperate. Not but that our inward joy may lawfully be accompanied with all outward innocent expreſſions of it: But we cannot be truly thankful, if we allow ourſelves at *this time* in any thing contrary to the purity and ſobriety of the Goſpel. It is matter of juſt and ſad complaint, being of great ſcandal to our Saviour, and his holy religion, that ſuch irregular and extravagant things are at *this time* commonly done by many, who call themſelves Chriſtians; and done under a pretence of doing honour to the memory of Chriſt's birth; as if, becauſe *the Son of God* was at this time made *man,* it were fit for *men* to make themſelves *beaſts.*

If we would honour him indeed, we muſt take care that our joy do not degenerate into ſin and ſenſuality, and that we do not expreſs it by lewdneſs and luxury, by intemperance and exceſs, by prodigal gaming, and profuſe waſting of our eſtates, *as the manner of ſome is*; as if we intended literally to requite our Saviour, *who being rich, for our ſakes became poor.* This is the way of *parting with houſes and land, and becoming poor for his ſake,* for which he will never thank nor reward us. This is not to commemorate the coming of our Saviour; but to contradict it, and openly to declare that we will uphold *the works of the devil* in deſpite of *the Son of God, who came to deſtroy them.* It is for all the world like that lewd and ſenſeleſs piece of loyalty, too much in faſhion ſome years ago, of being drunk for the king. Good God! that ever it ſhould paſs for a piece of religion among Chriſtians, to run into all manner of exceſs for twelve days together in honour of our Saviour! A greater aggravation of ſin cannot eaſily be imagined, than to abuſe the memory of the greateſt bleſſing that ever was, *Chriſt coming into the world to take away ſin,* into an opportunity of committing it; this is to repreſent the Son of God as a patron of ſin and licentiouſneſs, and to treat him more contumeliouſly than the *Jews* did, who bowed the knee to him and mocked him, and called him king, and ſpat upon him; and under a pretence of rejoicing for his birth, to *crucify to ourſelves afreſh the Lord of life and glory*; *and to put him to an open ſhame.*

I will conclude all with the Apoſtle's exhortation, *Rom.* xiii. 12, 13, 14. *Let us caſt off the works of darkneſs, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk decently as in the day*; *not in rioting and drunkenneſs, not in chambering and wantonneſs, not in ſtrife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and make not proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof.*

Now to our moſt gracious and merciful God, the great friend and lover of ſouls, who regarded us in our low and loſt condition, and caſt an eye of pity upon us, when *we were in our blood, and no other eye pitied us,* and when we had loſt and ruined ourſelves, was pleaſed in tender compaſſion to mankind, *to ſend his only begotten Son into the world, to ſeek and ſave us,* and by the purity of his doctrine, and the pattern of his life, and the ſacrifice of his death, to purchaſe eternal life for us, and to direct and lead us in the way to it: And to him alſo, the bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, who came down from heaven, that he might carry us thither, and took human nature upon him, that we thereby might be *made partakers of a divine nature*; and *humbled himſelf to death, even the death of the croſs*, that he might exalt us to glory and honour; and whilſt we were bitter enemies to him, gave ſuch a demonſtration of his love to us, as never any man did to his beſt friend: *Unto him that ſitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb that was ſlain; to God, even our Father, and to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the firſt begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth; to him, who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and prieſts unto God and his Father; to him be glory and honour, dominion and power, now and for ever.* Amen.

SERMON XVII.

Chriſt Jeſus the only Mediator between God and Men.

Preached at St. Peter's Cornhill on the feaſt of the Annunciation, 1691.

1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus; who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.

THESE words contain in them theſe four propoſitions; three of them expreſs, and the fourth of them ſufficiently implied in the text,

I. *That there is one God.*

II. *That there is one mediator between God and men; Chriſt Jeſus.*

III. *That he gave himſelf a ranſom for all.*

IV. *That the mediation or interceſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, is founded in the redemption of mankind.* For this ſeems to be the reaſon why it is added, that *he gave himſelf a ranſom for all*, to ſignify to us, that becauſe *he gave himſelf a ranſom for all*, therefore he intercedes for all. In virtue of that ſacrifice which he offered to God for the ſalvation of men, he offers up our prayers to God; and therefore it is acceptable to him, *that we ſhould pray for all men.* This ſeems to be the true connection of the Apoſtle's diſcourſe, and the force of his reaſoning, about our putting up *publick prayers for all men.*

I have in a former diſcourſe handled the *firſt* of theſe. I proceed now to the

IId *That there is one mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus.* One *mediator*, that is, *but one*; for the expreſſion is the very ſame concerning *one God*, and *one mediator*; and therefore if the Apoſtle when he ſays, *there is one God*, certainly means that there is *but one God*; it is equally certain, that when he ſays, *there is one mediator between God and men*, he means, there is *but one mediator*, viz. *Chriſt Jeſus.* He is the only mediator between God and men.

See a Sermon concerning the Unity of the Divine Nature; *Printed in the year* 1693.

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall proceed in this method.

I. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that God hath appointed but one mediator, or advocate, or interceſſor in heaven for us; in whoſe name, and by whoſe mediation and interceſſion, we are to offer up our prayers and ſervices to God.

II. That this is moſt agreeable to one main end and deſign of the chriſtian religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world.

III. That it is likewiſe evident *from the nature and reaſon of the thing itſelf*, that *there is but one mediator* and interceſſor in heaven for us, to offer up our prayers to God; and that there can be no more. And then,

IV. And *laſtly*, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, how contrary to the doctrine of the chriſtian religion, concerning *one mediator and interceſſor in heaven for us*, the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter is, in their invocation of Angels, and the bleſſed Virgin, and the ſaints, and making uſe of their mediation and interceſſion with

God for ſinners; as likewiſe how contrary it is to the doctrine and practice of the primitive chriſtian church: And then I ſhall anſwer their ſeveral pretences for this doctrine and practice; and ſhew that this practice is not only needleſs, but uſeleſs and unprofitable; and not only ſo, but very dangerous and impious.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that God hath appointed but one mediator, or advocate, or interceſſor in heaven for us, in whoſe name, and by whoſe interceſſion we are to offer up all our prayers and ſervices to God.

Beſides that it is expreſly ſaid here in the text, *there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus*, and that the ſcripture no where mentions any other: I ſay, beſides this, we are conſtantly directed to offer up our prayers and thankſgivings, and to perform all acts of worſhip in his name, and no other; and with a promiſe, that the prayers and ſervices, which we offer up in his name, will be graciouſly anſwered and accepted: *John* xiv. 13, 14. *Whatſoever ye ſhall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ſhall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* And chap. xvi. 23, 24. *And in that day ye ſhall ask me nothing: verily, verily, I ſay unto you, whatſoever ye ſhall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye ſhall receive, that your joy may be full. In that day*; that is, when I have left the world, and am gone to my Father, as he explains it in the 28*th* verſe, *In that day ye ſhall ask me nothing*; but *whatſoever ye ſhall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* That is, you ſhall not need to addreſs your prayers to me, but to my Father in my name. And ver. 26, 27. *At that day ye ſhall ask in my name*; that is, from the time that I am aſcended into heaven, ye ſhall put up all your prayers and requeſts to God, in my name; *and I ſay unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himſelf loveth you*; that is, I need not tell you (though I ſhall certainly do it) that I will intercede with the Father for you; for he of himſelf is kindly diſpoſed and affected towards you, for my ſake; *The father himſelf loveth you, becauſe ye have loved me.*

St. *Paul* likewiſe commands Chriſtians to perform all acts of religious worſhip in the name of Chriſt: *Col.* iii. 16, 17. *Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord, and whatſoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of our Lord Jeſus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* And giving this precept of addreſſing all our prayers and thankſgivings to God, by Jeſus Chriſt, as the only mediator between God and us, is the more remarkable, becauſe it is given in oppoſition to the worſhipping of God by any other mediators and interceſſors in heaven for us; and to that ſuperſtition which had begun ſo early to prevail among ſome Chriſtians at *Coloſſe* and *Laodicea*, of worſhipping God by the mediation and interceſſion of Angels, againſt which he had cautioned in the former chapter, ver. 18, 19. *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worſhipping of Angels, not holding the head.* Intimating, that for Chriſtians to addreſs themſelves to God, by any other mediator but Jeſus Chriſt only, was a defection from Chriſt *the head*, and *high-prieſt of our profeſſion.* And that this is the Apoſtle's meaning, *Theodoret* aſſures us, in his comment upon this place, where he tells us, that ſome who maintained an obſervance of the law, together with the Goſpel, aſſerted alſo, *That Angels were to be worſhipped*, ſaying, *That the law was given by them.* And this cuſtom, he tells us, remained a long time in *Phrygia* and *Piſidia*, and that upon this account it was, that the ſynod of *Laodicea* in *Phrygia* (about the middle of the fourth century) forbad Chriſtians by a law, to pray to Angels. And yet more expreſly in his comment upon thoſe words, chap. iii. ver. 17. *Whatſoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jeſus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* For, *becauſe* (ſays he) *they* (meaning thoſe of whom St. *Paul* warns the *Coloſſians* to beware, *becauſe they*) *did command men to worſhip Angels, he enjoins the contrary; that they ſhould adorn both their words and actions with the memory (or mention of) the name of Chriſt their Lord: And ſend ye up* (ſaith he) *thankſgiving to God and the Father by him, and not by the Angels.* And then he makes mention of the Canon of the ſynod of *Laodicea*, *which* (ſays he) *in purſuance of this rule, and being deſirous to cure that old diſeaſe, made it a law, that none ſhould pray unto Angels, nor forſake the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* It ſeems then that ſome relicks of that impious cuſtom, of praying to Angels, which *Theodoret* here calls, *that old diſeaſe*, had continued from St. *Paul*'s time, to the council of *Laodicea*, which was the occaſion of that ſevere *Canon* then made about that matter; the very words whereof I will ſet down, becauſe they are remarkable; *viz. that Chriſtians*

ſtians ought not to forſake the church of God, and go away from it, and to invocate Angels, and to make conventicles, all which are forbidden. If any therefore be found giving himſelf to this ſecret idolatry, let him be anathema; becauſe he hath forſaken our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the Son of God, and is gone over to idolatry. What ſhall be ſaid to them, who do not only ſecretly, and in their private devotions, but in the publick aſſemblies of Chriſtians, and in the moſt publick offices of their church, invocate angels, and pray to them? So that it was praying to angels (or making uſe of them as mediators and interceſſors with God for us) which St. *Paul* here reproves ſo ſeverely in the *Coloſſians*, as a defection from Chriſt and the chriſtian religion.

And indeed, conſidering how frequently the ſcripture ſpeaks of Chriſt, as *our only way to God, and by whom alone we have acceſs to the throne of grace*, we cannot doubt but that God hath conſtituted him our only mediator and interceſſor, by whom we are to addreſs all our requeſts to God. *John* xiv. 6. *Jeſus* there ſaith unto *Thomas, I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me. I am the way, the truth, and the life*; that is, the true and living way to the Father (which the Apoſtle calls *a new and living way*, Heb. x. 19, 20. *Having therefore boldneſs to enter into the holieſt by the blood of Jeſus, by a new and living way; which he hath conſecrated for us.*) *No man cometh to the Father but by me*; that is, we can have no acceſs to God by prayer, or by any other acts of religious worſhip but by him. So St. *Paul* tells us, *Eph.* ii. 18. *For through him* (ſpeaking of Chriſt) *we both have an acceſs by one Spirit unto the Father. We both*, that is, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*. Under the law the *Jews* had acceſs to God by their high-prieſt, who interceded with God, and offered up prayers in behalf of the people. The *Gentiles*, they addreſſed themſelves to God by innumerable mediators, by Angels, and the ſouls of their departed heroes, which were the *Pagan* ſaints. Inſtead of all theſe, God hath appointed one mediator and interceſſor in heaven for us, *Jeſus the Son of God*, and *by him all mankind*, both *Jews and Gentiles*, *have acceſs by one Spirit unto the Father*,

And we have no need of any other, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* reaſons, chap. vii. 24, 25. *But this perſon* (ſpeaking of Chriſt) *becauſe he continueth for ever, hath an unchangeable prieſthood*, ἀπαράβατον, *a prieſthood which doth not paſs from one to another*, as the prieſthood under the law did, when upon the death of one high-prieſt, another ſucceeded in his place; but our high-prieſt under the Goſpel, *ſince he abides for ever, is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for us.* So that Jeſus Chriſt is an all-ſufficient mediator, and able to carry on and accompliſh the work of our ſalvation from firſt to laſt: And as we do not find that God hath appointed any other; ſo we are ſure that there needs no other, *ſince he is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him, and that he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us.*

Secondly, I proceed now in the *ſecond* place to ſhew, that this doctrine or principle of *one mediator between God and man*, is moſt agreeable to one main end and deſign of the chriſtian religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world, which was *to deſtroy idolatry out of the world*; which St. *John* calls *the works of the devil*, 1 John iii. 8. *For this purpoſe the Son of God was manifeſted, that he might deſtroy*, ἵνα λύσῃ, *that he might diſſolve or demoliſh the works of the devil*; by which St. *John* does more eſpecially mean *the idolatrous worſhip of the heathen*, which conſiſted in the multitude of their gods, and the bloody and barbarous rites and ſacrifices, whereby they worſhipped them; and likewiſe in the multitude of their mediators between the gods and men, who were alſo eſteemed by them an inferior ſort of deities. Both theſe kinds of idolatry had ſtrangely prevailed, and over-run the world before the appearance of our Lord and Saviour, who came on purpoſe to deliver mankind from the horrible ſuperſtition and ſlavery of the worſhip of falſe gods, to pull down this kingdom of the devil, and to demoliſh that fabrick which he had been ſo long a rearing, and to beat him out of thoſe ſtrong holds, which he thought had been impregnable.

God indeed gave ſome check to theſe many ages before, and not long after their firſt appearance, by the *Jewiſh* religion, which was on purpoſe introduced and confirmed, and eſtabliſhed by ſo many and ſuch mighty miracles, to preſerve and keep alive in the world the primitive tradition and belief of *the one true God*; and likewiſe to be (as it were) ſome ſhadow and rude draught of that more perfect diſpenſation of *the chriſtian religion*, which, by *one ſacrifice once offered*, and by *one Mediator between God and* *men*, was to put an end to the infinite ſuperſtitions of the heathen worſhip, and all the bloody and barbarous rites of it, and likewiſe to the idolatry they were guilty of, in the worſhip of their inferior deities, whom they look'd upon as a middle ſort of powers between the gods and men, and therefore addreſſed themſelves to them, as mediators between the ſuperior and heavenly gods, and men here on earth. This was plainly one of the great deſigns of the chriſtian religion, and therefore it concerns Chriſtians to underſtand it, and to be very careful that they do not ſuffer themſelves to be deluded by any ſpecious pretences whatſoever, to bring theſe things back again into the chriſtian religion, for the ruin and extirpation whereof, it was purpoſely deſigned and intended.

And this ſeems plainly to be the meaning of that caution, wherewith St. *John* concludes his catholick or general epiſtle, namely, that Chriſtians ſhould be very careful that they were not carried back again into the heathen idolatry, by the confident pretences of the *Gnoſtick* hereticks to higher degrees of knowledge and illumination than other Chriſtians had; that is, by their pretending to be *the infallible Church, and the only true and genuine Chriſtians.* For it is againſt this *ſect*, that this epiſtle is plainly deſigned, which St. *John* thus concludes, chap. v. from verſe the 18th to the end; *We know that whoſoever is born of God ſinneth not*; meaning that he doth not commit *the ſin unto death*, which he had ſpoken of juſt before (*viz.* apoſtaſy from chriſtianity to the heathen idolatry, or that which was very like it) *whoſoever is born of God doth not commit this ſin, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himſelf, and that wicked one toucheth him not*; that is, he preſerveth himſelf from the contagion of idolatry, into which the devil was ſo buſy to ſeduce mankind. *And we know that we are of God*, that is, do belong to the true God, and are worſhippers of him: *And the whole world lieth in wickedneſs, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, is in the power, or under the dominion of that wicked one*; that is, the greateſt part of mankind was ſunk into idolatry, and the worſhip of the devil. *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an underſtanding, that we may know him that is true. We know*, that is, we Chriſtians are better taught by the chriſtian religion, to acknowledge and worſhip the only true God: *And we are in him that is true, in* or *by his Son Jeſus Chriſt*; that is, we worſhip the only true God, by his Son Jeſus Chriſt. And then he concludes, *Little children, keep yourſelves from idols*; intimating hereby, that the worſhipping of any other, beſides this only true God, and by any other mediator than Jeſus Chriſt, is *idolatry.*

There were, indeed, two very ancient and common notions, both amongſt *Jews* and *Gentiles*, of the original whereof it is hard to give any certain account; only this is certain, that they did prevail very early, and did very generally poſſeſs mankind: And they were theſe: *Firſt*, that God was not to be appeaſed towards ſinners, merely upon their repentance, without the death and ſuffering of ſome other in their ſtead; and that God would accept of this vicarious puniſhment and ſuffering, inſtead of the death of the ſinner himſelf. And this ſeems to have given the original to the ſacrifices of living creatures, to appeaſe the wrath of God towards ſinners; which, in proceſs of time, as the worſhip of falſe gods prevailed in the world, did proceed to that degree of ſuperſtition and barbarous inhumanity, that by the inſtigation of the devil, men offered up the blood of their children, and ſacrificed their ſons and daughters to their idols and falſe gods. *Secondly*, another common notion, which had likewiſe poſſeſſed mankind was, that God was not to be immediately approached by ſinful men; but that their prayers were to be offered up to the deity by certain mediators and interceſſors, that were to procure for them the favour of the gods, and the gracious anſwer and acceptance of their prayers. And this was the original of that other ſort of heathen idolatry, which conſiſted in the worſhip of their dæmons and heroes, that is, of Angels and ſouls departed, *viz.* of ſuch eminent perſons as had been great benefactors to mankind, and, for their worthy deeds upon earth, were canonized, and tranſlated into the number of their inferior gods: By theſe, as the chief courtiers and favourites of heaven, they addreſſed their prayers and ſupplications to the ſuperior gods.

Now with theſe notions, which had generally poſſeſs'd mankind (how imperfect ſoever) God was pleaſed to comply ſo far, as in the frame of the *Jewiſh* religion (which was deſigned for a type of the more perfect inſtitution of the chriſtian religion, and a preparation for it:) I ſay, God was pleaſed to comply ſo far with theſe notions, as to appoint ſacrifices to be ſlain and offered up for the ſinner; and likewiſe *an high-prieſt, that once a year ſhould enter into the holy of holies, with the blood of ſacrifices* that were offered up for the people, to make expiation for them; and in virtue of that blood, *ſhould intercede for the people*, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* does declare at large. And when God *ſent his ſon in the fulneſs* of time, he was pleaſed likewiſe, in the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, (that perfect inſtitution which was never to be alter'd) to have ſo much regard to theſe common notions and apprehenſions of mankind, as to provide for the ſupply of thoſe two great wants, which they ſeemed always to have laboured under, and concerning which they were at ſo great a loſs, *viz.* an effectual expiatory ſacrifice for ſins upon earth, and a powerful mediator and interceſſor with God in heaven: And both theſe by the ſame perſon, *Jeſus Chriſt*, *who appeared in the end of the world, to take away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf*; and in the merit and virtue of that ſacrifice, *appearing in heaven in the preſence of God for us*, is become a perpetual advocate, and a moſt powerful interceſſor with God in heaven for us. So that inſtead of the endleſs ſacrifices of the *Jewiſh* religion, which were ineffectual to the real expiation of ſin, and only types and ſhadows of the true expiatory ſacrifice, and inſtead of the bloody and inhuman ſacrifices of the heathen idolatry; the Son of God hath *by one ſacrifice for ſin once offered, perfected for ever them that are ſanctified, and obtained eternal redemption for us.* And inſtead of the mediation of Angels, and the ſouls of their departed heroes, which the heathen made uſe of to offer up their prayers to the Gods, we have *one mediator between God and men*, appointed by God himſelf, *Jeſus the Son of God*, who in our nature is aſcended into heaven, *to appear in the preſence of God for us.* And who ſo fit to be our patron and advocate, as he who was our ſacrifice and propitiation?

Thus the method of our redemption, as it was by the wiſdom of God admirably ſuited to the common apprehenſions of mankind; concerning the neceſſity of a ſacrifice to make expiation of ſin, and of a mediator to intercede with God for ſinners; ſo was it likewiſe excellently fitted, not only to put an end to the *Jewiſh* ſacrifices, but likewiſe to aboliſh the barbarous ſacrifices and rites of the heathen idolatry, and to caſhier that infinite number of mediators and interceſſors, by whom they addreſſed their prayers to the deity; and, inſtead of all this, to introduce a more reaſonable and ſpiritual worſhip, more agreeable to the nature and perfections of God and the reaſon of mankind; which was one of the main and principal deſigns of the chriſtian religion: And therefore to bring in any other mediators, to intercede in heaven for us (whether Angels or ſaints) and by them to offer up our prayers to God, is directly contrary to the deſign of the chriſtian religion.

Thirdly, It is likewiſe evident *from the nature and reaſon of the thing itſelf*, that *there is but one mediator* and interceſſor in heaven, who offers up our prayers to God, and that there can be no more. Becauſe under the Goſpel there being *but one high-prieſt*, and *but one ſacrifice once offered for ſin*; and interceſſion for ſinners being founded in the merit and virtue of the ſacrifice, by which expiation for ſin is made, there can be no other *mediator of interceſſion*, but he who hath made expiation of ſin, by a ſacrifice offered to God for that purpoſe; and this *Jeſus Chriſt* only hath done. He is both *our high-prieſt*, and our *ſacrifice*; and therefore he only, in the merit and virtue of that ſacrifice, which he offered upon earth, can *intercede* in heaven for us; and offer up our prayers to God. Others may pray to God for us; as our brethren upon earth do, and perhaps the Angels and ſaints in heaven; but none of theſe can offer up our prayers to God, and procure the acceptance of them; for that can only be done in virtue of a ſacrifice firſt offered, and by him that offered it; this being the peculiar office and qualification of a *mediator* or *interceſſor*, properly ſo called.

It is the plain deſign of the author of the epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, to prove that Chriſt is our *only mediator* in heaven, in virtue of that ſacrifice for ſin, which he offered upon earth; and that he alone *appears in the preſence of God for us*, to preſent our requeſts to him, and obtain a gracious anſwer of them; and he ſhews at large how this was particularly typified by the *Jewiſh high-prieſt*, who upon the great day of expiation, after the ſacrifice was ſlain without, *entered alone into the holy of holies, with the blood of the ſacrifices*, in virtue whereof he *made interceſſion for the people*. Anſwerably to this, *Jeſus the high-prieſt of our profeſſion*, *offered himſelf a ſacrifice* for the ſins of men, and, in virtue of that ſacrifice, *is entered into the high place not made with hands*, that is, *into heaven itſelf*, *there to appear in the preſence of God for us*, *where he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us*, in virtue of that *eternal redemption which he hath obtained for us*, by the price of his blood, as the Apoſtle declares in ſeveral chapters of that epiſtle. So that this interceſſion being founded in the merit of a ſacrifice, which he alone offered, he is of neceſſity *the only mediator between God and men.*

And for this reaſon it is, that the mediation and interceſſion of *Chriſt* is ſo frequently in ſcripture mentioned together with the expiation which he made for the ſins of men, or (which is the ſame) with the price which he paid for the redemption of mankind; becauſe the one is founded in the other, and depends upon it. So we find, 1 *John* ii. 1, 2. *If any man ſin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our ſins; and not for ours only, but alſo for the ſins of the whole world.* And here likewiſe in the text, *There is one mediator between God and men, the Man Chriſt Jeſus, who gave himſelf a ranſom for all*; therefore *the only mediator between God and men,* becauſe *he only gave himſelf a ranſom for all men.* The efficacy and prevalency of his mediation, being founded in the merit and virtue of the ranſom of his blood.

And the force of theſe texts, and this reaſoning from them, is not to be avoided and turned off, by diſtinguiſhing between a *mediator of redemption* and *of interceſſion,* and by ſaying, that it is true, that Chriſt is *the only mediator of redemption,* but there may be many *mediators of interceſſion:* For if the force of his being advocate or interceſſor be founded in the virtue of his ranſom and propitiation (as I have plainly ſhewn, to the conviction of any that are not ſtrongly prejudiced, and that will read and conſider what the ſcripture ſays in this matter without prepoſſeſſion) then it is plain, that none can be a proper *mediator of interceſſion,* but he that paid the price of our redemption: So that *the mediator of our redemption,* and *our mediator of interceſſion,* muſt of neceſſity be one and the ſame perſon; and none can appear in the quality of *our advocate with the Father,* but he only who is *the propitiation for the ſins of the whole world.*

I ſhould now have proceeded to

The *Fourth* thing I propoſed in the handling of this argument, namely, to ſhew how contrary to this doctrine of the chriſtian religion, concerning *one only mediator and interceſſor in heaven for us,* the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* is in this matter; namely, in their invocation of Angels, and the bleſſed Virgin, and the Saints, and flying to their help, and making uſe of their mediation and interceſſion with God for ſinners: As likewiſe how contrary all this is to the doctrine and practice of the chriſtian church, for ſeveral of the firſt ages of it. And then I ſhould have anſwer'd their chief pretences and excuſes for theſe things, and ſhewed that this practice of theirs is not only needleſs (being no where commanded by God) but uſeleſs alſo, and unprofitable; and not only ſo, but very dangerous and impious, being contrary to the chriſtian religion, and highly derogating from the virtue and merit of Chriſt's ſacrifice, and from the honour of *the only mediator between God and men.* But of this another time.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

SERMON XVIII.

Chriſt Jeſus the only Mediator between God and Men.

1 TIM. ii. 5, 6.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus; who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.

IN theſe words are *four* propoſitions: *three* expreſt, and the *fourth* implied.

I. *That there is one God.*

II. *That there is one mediator between God and men; Chriſt Jeſus.*

III. *That he gave himſelf a ranſom for all.*

IV. *That the mediation or interceſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, is founded in his redemption of mankind: That becauſe he gave himſelf a ranſom for all men,* therefore he, and he only, is qualified to intercede for all men, in virtue of that ſacrifice which he offer'd for the ſalvation of all mankind.

The *Second* of theſe I ſpake to the laſt time, and endeavour'd to ſhew,

1. That God hath appointed *but one mediator*, or advocate or interceſſor in heaven for us; by whoſe mediation we are to offer up all our prayers and ſervices to God.

2. That this doctrine of *one mediator* is moſt agreeable to one main end and deſign of the chriſtian religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world, which was to deſtroy idolatry.

3. That from the nature and reaſon of the thing (*viz.* becauſe interceſſion for ſinners is founded in the merit of that ſacrifice, by which expiation of ſin is made) there can be no other *mediator of interceſſion*, but he who hath made expiation for ſin, by a ſacrifice offered to God for that purpoſe; and this *Jeſus Chriſt* only hath done. Thus far I have gone: I proceed now to

The *Fourth* thing which I propoſed in the handling of this argument, namely, to ſhew how contrary to this doctrine of the chriſtian religion, *concerning one only mediator and interceſſor* in heaven for us, the doctrine and the practice of the church of *Rome* is in this matter; namely, in their invocation of Angels, and the bleſſed Virgin, and the ſaints, and flying to their help, and making uſe of their mediation and interceſſion with God for ſinners.

And that I may proceed more diſtinctly in this argument, I ſhall handle it under theſe particular heads.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome*, in this matter, is contrary to the doctrine of the chriſtian religion, concerning *one only mediator and interceſſor* in heaven for us.

Secondly, That it is contrary to the doctrine and practice of the chriſtian church, for ſeveral of the firſt ages of it.

Thirdly, I ſhall endeavour to anſwer their chief pretences and excuſes, for this doctrine and practice.

Fourthly, To ſhew that this doctrine and practice of theirs is not only needleſs, being no where commanded by God, but uſeleſs alſo, and unprofitable.

Fifthly, And not only ſo, but very dangerous and impious; becauſe contrary to the chriſtian religion, and greatly derogating from the virtue and merit of Chriſt's ſacrifice, and from the hononr of *the only mediator between God and men.*

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter, is contrary to the doctrine of the chriſtian religion concerning *one only mediator and interceſſor* in heaven for us; namely in their invocation of Angels, and the bleſſed Virgin, and the ſaints, and flying to their help, and making uſe of their mediation and interceſſion with God for ſinners.

That Jeſus Chriſt is *our only mediator and interceſſor* with God in heaven, by whom we have acceſs to God in any action of religious worſhip, and that all our prayers and ſervices are to be offered up to God only by him, and in his name and mediation, and no other, I have plainly ſhewed from ſcripture, and proved it by an invincible argument, taken likewiſe from ſcripture; namely, becauſe the efficacy and prevalency of his mediation and interceſſion is founded in the virtue and merit of his ſacrifice; and that he is therefore *the only mediator between God and men, becauſe he only gave himſelf a ranſom for all*; he is therefore *our only advocate with the father*, becauſe *he only is the propitiation for our ſins, and for the ſins of the whole world.*

I have ſhewed likewiſe, that the ſcripture excludes Angels from being our mediators with God, from the main ſcope and deſign of the epiſtle to the *Coloſſians*; and much more are the ſaints departed excluded from this office, being inferior to the Angels, not only in the dignity and excellency of their beings, but very probably in the degree of their knowledge.

In ſhort, prayer is a proper act of religious worſhip, and therefore peculiar to God alone; and we are commanded *to worſhip the Lord our God, and to ſerve him only:* And no where in ſcripture are we directed to addreſs our prayers and ſupplications and thankſgivings to any but God *alone*, and only in the name and mediation of *Jeſus Chriſt.* Our bleſſed Saviour himſelf hath taught us, to put up all our prayers to God our heavenly Father, Luke xi. 12. *when you pray, ſay, Our Father which art in heaven.* Which plainly ſhews, to whom all our prayers are to be addreſs'd; and unleſs we can call an Angel, or the bleſſed Virgin, or a ſaint, *Our Father*, we can pray to none of them.

And elſewhere he as plainly directs us, by whom we are to apply ourſelves to God, and in whoſe name and mediation we are to put up all our requeſts to him, *John* xiv. 6. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me:* And then it follows, ver. 13. 14. *And whatſoever you ſhall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorify'd in the Son. If ye ſhall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* Nothing is clearer in the whole Bible, *than one mediator between God and men, Chriſt Jeſus,* and that he is *our only advocate and interceſſor* with God in heaven for us.

Secondly, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew that the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter, is contrary to that of the chriſtian church, for ſeveral of the firſt ages of it.

As for the ages of the Apoſtles it hath been already proved out of their writings. That it was not practiſed in the three firſt ages, we have the acknowledgment of cardinal *Perron*, and others of their learned writers; and they give a very remarkable reaſon for it; namely, becauſe the worſhip and invocation of ſaints and Angels, and addreſſing our prayers to God by them, might have ſeem'd to have given countenance to the heathen idolatry. From whence I cannot forbear, by the way, to make theſe two obſervations. 1. That the invocation of ſaints and Angels, and the bleſſed Virgin, and addreſſing ourſelves to God by their mediation, was not in thoſe primitive ages eſteemed a duty of the chriſtian religion; becauſe, if it had, it could not have been omitted for fear of the ſcandal conſequent upon it: And if it was not a duty then, by what authority or law, can it be made ſo ſince? 2. That this practice is very liable to the ſuſpicion of idolatry; and ſurely every Chriſtian cannot but think it fit, that the church of Chriſt ſhould, like a chaſte ſpouſe, not only be free from the crime, but from all ſuſpicion of idolatry.

And for the next ages after the Apoſtles, nothing is plainer, than that both their doctrine and practice were contrary to the doctrine and practice of the preſent church of *Rome* in this matter. The moſt ancient fathers of the chriſtian church do conſtantly define prayer, to be *an addreſs to God*; and therefore it cannot be made to any but God only: And after the riſe of *Arianiſm*, they argued for the divinity of Chriſt, againſt the *Arians*, from our praying to him; which argument were of no force, if prayers might be made to any but God; and this was in the beginning of the fourth age.

And we no where find any mention of thoſe diſtinctions, *of Gods by nature*, and *Gods by participation* (as *Bellarmine* calls the Angels and ſaints) or of *a ſupreme* and *inferior religious worſhip*; or of *a mediator of redemption*, and *a mediator of interceſſion*; which are ſo commonly made uſe of by the church of *Rome* in this controverſy.

And, which is as conſiderable as any of the reſt, the ancient fathers were generally of opinion, that the ſaints were not admitted to the beatific viſion till after the day of judgment; and this is acknowledged by the moſt learned of the church of *Rome*. But this very opinion takes away the foundation of praying to ſaints; becauſe the church of *Rome* grounds it upon their reigning with Chriſt in heaven, and upon the light and knowledge which is communicated to them in the beatific viſion; and if ſo, then they who believed the ſaints not yet to be admitted to this viſion, could have no reaſon or ground to pray to them.

And *laſtly*, The ancient church prayed for ſaints departed, and for the bleſſed Virgin herſelf; and therefore could not pray to them, as interceſſors for them in heaven, for whom they themſelves interceded upon earth. And therefore the church of *Rome*, in compliance with the change which they have made in their doctrine, have changed *the Miſſal* in that point, and inſtead of praying for St. *Leo* (one of their popes) as they were wont to do in their ancient *Miſſal*, in this form, *Grant, O Lord, that this oblation may be profitable to the ſoul of thy ſervant* Leo; the *Collect* is now changed in the preſent *Roman Miſſal* into this form, *Grant, O Lord, that by the interceſſion of bleſſed* Leo, *this offering may be profitable to us*: And (as the gloſs upon the *canon law* obſerves) this change was made in their *Miſſal* upon very good reaſon; *becauſe anciently they prayed for* Leo, *but now they pray to him*; which is an ingenuous acknowledgment, that both the doctrine and practice of their church are plainly changed, from what they anciently were in this matter.

What the doctrines and practices of the church of *Rome* are in this matter, all the world ſees, and they themſelves are ſo aſhamed of them, that of late all their endeavours have been, to repreſent them otherwiſe than in truth they are, and to obtrude upon us a *new popery*, which they think themſelves better able to defend than *the old*; which yet they have not ſhewn that they are ſo well able to do; and therefore now, inſtead of defending the true doctrines and practices of their own church, they would fain mince and diſguiſe them, and change them into ſomething that comes nearer to the *Proteſtant* doctrine in thoſe points: As if they had no way to defend their own doctrines, but by ſeeming to deſert them, and by bringing them as near to ours as poſſibly they can.

But take them, as they have mollified them and par'd them, to render them more plauſible and tenable; that which ſtill remains of them I mean *the ſolemn invocation of ſaints and Angels, as mediators and interceſſors with God in heaven for us*, is plainly contrary both to the doctrine and practice of the primitive ages of chriſtianity.

As for the age of the Apoſtles, I have already ſhewn it; and the matter is as clear for ſeveral of the next following ages, as I ſhall briefly ſhew, from a few very plain teſtimonies.

In the next age to the Apoſtles, we have an epiſtle of one of the ſeven churches (I mean the church of *Smyrna*) in which in vindication of themſelves from that calumny which was raiſed againſt them by the *Jews*, among the heathen, *that if they permitted the Chriſtians to have the body of the martyred* Polycarp, *they would leave Chriſt to worſhip* Polycarp; I ſay, in vindication of themſelves from this calumny, they declare themſelves thus, *Not knowing* (ſay they) *that we can neither leave Chriſt who ſuffered for the ſalvation of the world of thoſe that are ſaved, nor worſhip any other*; or (as it is in the old *latin* tranſlation) *nor offer up the ſupplication of prayer to any other perſon*; *for as for Jeſus Chriſt, we adore him, as being the Son of God; but as for the Martyrs, we love them, as the diſciples and imitators of the Lord.* So that they plainly exclude the ſaints from any ſort of religious worſhip, of which prayer or invocation was always eſteemed a very conſiderable part.

Irenæus likewiſe tells us, (*l.* 2.) That *the church doth nothing* (ſpeaking of the miracles which were wrought) *by the invocation of Angels, nor by inchantment, nor by any other wicked arts; but by prayers to the Lord, who made all things, and by calling on the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* Here all invocation of Angels, and by the ſame or greater reaſon, of the ſaints, is excluded. And *Clemens Alexandrinus* delivers it as the doctrine of the church; that *ſince there is but one good God, therefore both we and the Angels pray to him, both for the giving, and the continuance of good things.*

In the next age, *Origen* is ſo full and expreſs in this matter, that it is not poſſible for any proteſtant to ſpeak more poſitively and clearly, *l.* 8. *contr. Celſum*, where he does on ſet purpoſe declare and vindicate the chriſtian doctrine and practice in this matter; *We worſhip* (ſays he) *the one only God, and his one only Son, and Word, and image, with our utmoſt ſupplications and honours, bringing our prayers to the God of all things, through his only begotten Son*; and afterwards, *Away* (ſays he) *with* Celſus *his counſel, that ſays, we muſt pray to dæmons* (or Angels) *for we muſt pray only to God who is above all; we muſt pray to the only begotten and firſt born of every creature, and we muſt beſeech him to offer up our prayers which we make to him to his God and our God:* And again (ſpeaking of Angels) *As for the favour of others (if that be to be regarded) we know, that thouſands of thouſands ſtand before him, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand miniſter unto him; theſe are our brethren, and friends, who when they ſee us imitating their piety towards God, work together to the ſalvation of thoſe who call upon God, and pray as they ought to do,* that is, *to God only*; and (*l.* 5.) where *Celſus* urges him with this, That *the ſcriptures call Angels Gods*, he tells him, *that the ſcriptures do not call the Angels Gods, with any deſign to require us to worſhip and adore them inſtead of God, who are miniſtring ſpirits, and bring meſſages and bleſſings down to us from God; for* (ſays he) *all ſupplications and prayer, and interceſſion, and giving of thanks, muſt be ſent up to God, who is above all, by the high-prieſt who is above all Angels, and is the living Word and God.* And though *Angels* be only here mentioned, yet by the ſame reaſon, *all other creatures* are excluded, from being the objects of our religious worſhip and invocation, or *mediators of interceſſion* with God for us; becauſe *all ſupplication and prayer, and interceſſion, and thankſgiving, muſt be ſent up to God by our high-prieſt, who is the living Word and God. Let us then alſo* (as he goes on) *make ſupplication to the Word himſelf: and interceſſion, and giving of thanks, and prayer: But to invocate Angels is not reaſonable; ſince we do not comprehend the* *knowledge of them, which is above us; and if we could comprehend the knowledge of them, which is wonderful and ſecret, this very knowledge, which declares to us their nature and office, would not allow us to preſume to pray to any other, but to the God who is Lord over all, and abundantly ſufficient for all, by our Saviour the Son of God*; where he gives two plain Reaſons, why we ought to pray only to God, and to offer up our prayers only by the mediation of Jeſus Chriſt, the Son of God and our Saviour: *Firſt*, Becauſe *he only is Lord over all*, and therefore the worſhip of prayer is to be given to him only. And then, *Secondly*, Becauſe we have no need of any other patron and benefactor, or of any other mediator and advocate, *he is abundantly ſufficient for all, by our Saviour the Son of God.*

In the ſame age *Novatian*, in his book concerning the Trinity, makes uſe of this argument to prove the divinity of Chriſt; becauſe he hears our prayers, when we call upon him. *If Chriſt* (ſays he) *be only a man, how can he be preſent every where to thoſe that call upon him; ſince this is not the nature of man, but of God, to be able to be preſent every where? If Chriſt be only a man, why do we in our prayers call upon him as mediator,; ſince prayer to a man is deemed ineffectual to help or ſave us? If Chriſt be only man, why do we put our hope in him; ſince hope in a man is accurſed in ſcripture?*

In the IVth century, *Apoſtolical Conſtitutions*, under the name of *Clemens Romanus* (but undoubtedly written in that age) give us a pregnant negative teſtimony in this matter; for though a great many of the publick prayers are there ſet down at large, yet they are all directed to *God alone*, and not the leaſt intimation there of any prayer made to the *Angels* or *ſaints*, or even to *the Virgin Mary*; not of their interceſſion or aid; which now makes ſo great a part of the publick devotions of the church of *Rome.*

Athanaſius, in his fourth oration againſt the *Arians*, proves the unity of the Father and the Son from 1 *Theſſ.* iii. 11. *Now God himſelf, and our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, direct our way unto you.* From whence he argues thus, *One would not pray to receive any thing from the Father and the Angels, or from any other creature; nor would one ſay, God and the Angels give thee this; but one would pray to receive any thing from the Father and the Son becauſe of their unity and uniform gift; for all things that are given by the Father, are given by the Son, and there is nothing which the Father doth not work by the Son*; and then concludes, *that it doth not belong to any, but to God alone, to bleſs and grant deliverances.* This I take to be a very remarkable teſtimony againſt the church of *Rome*, who in their *publick offices* join the bleſſed Virgin with God, and our Saviour, in the ſame breath, and ſometimes put her before her Son; *Let* Mary *and her Son bleſs us*, as it is in *the office of the bleſſed Virgin*; in direct contradiction to what I juſt now cited out of *Athanaſius:* and nothing ſo common in their mouths, as *Jeſu Maria*; *Jeſus* and *Mary*; nothing more frequent in their moſt eminent writers, than to join them together in their doxologies and thankſgivings, *Glory be to God, and the bleſſed Virgin, and to Jeſus Chriſt*, ſays *Gregory de Valencia.* And *Bellarmin* himſelf concludes his diſputations, concerning the worſhip of ſaints in theſe words, *Praiſe be to God and the bleſſed Virgin mother* Mary; *likewiſe to Jeſus Chriſt, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, be praiſe and glory.* And in the very *Roman Miſſal* itſelf, they make confeſſion of their ſins *to God Almighty, and the bleſſed Virgin* Mary, *to St.* Michael *the Archangel, and to all the ſaints.* And in their abſolution they join together *the paſſion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt and the merits of the bleſſed Virgin, and of all the ſaints, for the remiſſion of ſins.* And is not this the very thing which *Athanaſius* doth ſo ſeverely condemn?

I have mentioned before the council of *Laodicea*, which about the middle of this century condemns the worſhip of Angels, and praying to them, as downright idolatry; And towards the end of this fourth age, and in the beginning of the fifth, when it is pretended that praying to ſaints did begin (though it was rather by way of apoſtrophe and rhetorical addreſs, than of formal invocation) there are expreſs teſtimonies againſt it of the moſt eminent fathers of that time. I will inſtance but in three, *Epiphanius*, St. *Chryſoſtom*, and St. *Auguſtine.*

Epiphanius, in his confutation of the hereſy of the *Collyridians* (which he calls the hereſy of the women, becauſe they firſt began the worſhip of the Virgin *Mary)* declares moſt expreſly againſt the worſhip of any creature whatſoever; *For neither* (ſays he) *is* Elias *to be worſhipped, though he is reckoned among the living* (meaning that he was taken up into heaven, body and ſoul) *nor* John, *nor any other of the ſaints:* And as for the virgin *Mary*, he particularly adds, *that if God will not have us to worſhip the Angels, how much more would he not have us to worſhip her that was born of* Anna? And concludes, *let* Mary *be had in honour; but let the Lord be worſhipped.*

St. *Chryſoſtome*, in a long diſcourſe, perſuades men to addreſs their prayers immediately to God, and not as we addreſs ourſelves to great men by their officers and favourites; and tells us, *that there is no need of ſuch interceſſors with God, who is not ſo ready to grant our petitions, when we intreat him by others, as when we pray to him ourſelves.*

Laſtly, St. *Auguſtine*, *becauſe the ſcriptures pronounce him accurſed that putteth his truſt in man*; from thence he argues that *therefore we ought not to aſk of any other, but of our Lord God, either the grace to do well, or the reward of it.* The contrary to which I am ſure is done in ſeveral of the publick prayers uſed in the church of *Rome*. And, *lib.* 22. *de civ. Dei*, he expreſly tells us, that *the names of the martyrs were recited in their prayers at the altar; but they were not invocated by the prieſt, who did celebrate divine ſervice.* And in the third council of *Carthage* (which was in St. *Auguſtine*'s time) *it is enjoined* (can. 33.) *that all prayers that were made at the altar, ſhould be directed to the Father.* Which how it is obſerved in the church of *Rome*, we all know.

To conclude this matter, it cannot be made appear, that there were any prayers to ſaints in the publick offices of the church, till towards the end of the eighth century. For in the year 754 the invocation of ſaints was condemned by a council of three hundred thirty-eight biſhops at *Conſtantinople*, as is acknowledged by the ſecond council of *Nice*, which firſt eſtabliſhed this ſuperſtition, in the year 787; and this very council was condemned ſeven years after, in a council at *Francfort*, and declared void, and to be no otherwiſe eſteemed of, than the council of *Ariminum*.

Thus you ſee. when this doctrine and practice, ſo contrary to the doctrine and practice of a great many of the firſt ages of the chriſtian church, was firſt eſtabliſhed, namely, at the ſame time with *the worſhip of images*, and when the firſt foundation of *tranſubſtantiation* was laid; which as they began at the ſame time, ſo they are very fit to go together.

I ſhould now have proceeded to the next thing which I propoſed, namely, to anſwer the chief pretences which are made for this doctrine and practice. But of *that* in the following diſcourſe.

SERMON XIX.

The Third Sermon on this Text.

Chriſt Jeſus the only Mediator between God and Men.

1 TIM. ii. 5, 6.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus; who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.

IN the *two* former diſcourſes upon this *text*, I have treated on the *ſecond propoſition* I laid down from the words; *viz. that there is but one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus.* In treating of this propoſition, I ſhewed,

Firſt, That it is agreeable to ſcripture.

Secondly, That it is agreeable to one great end and deſign of the chriſtian religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world, which was to deſtroy idolatry out of it.

Thirdly, That from the nature and reaſon of the thing, there can be but one *mediator or interceſſor* in heaven with God for ſinners; and that he can be no other than *Jeſus Chriſt*.

Fourthly, I ſhewed how contrary to this doctrine the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* is, in their invocation of angels and the bleſſed Virgin, and the ſaints, and making uſe of their *mediation* and *interceſſion* with God for ſinners.

This I endeavoured to do, by ſhewing *1ſt*, How contrary this is to the doctrine of the ſcriptures. *2dly*, How contrary to the doctrine and practice of the church, for ſeveral of the firſt ages of it. And thus far I have gone.

I proceed now, in the *3d* place, to anſwer the chief pretences and excuſes which are made by thoſe of the church of *Rome*, for this doctrine and practice.

As, 1. That they only ſay, that it is lawful to pray to Angels and ſaints; but do not enjoin and require it. To this I anſwer two things.

(1.) In ſaying that it is lawful to pray to ſaints and Angels (if they went no farther) they ſay that which they can never make good; becauſe prayer is an act of religious worſhip, and peculiar and proper to God only, and therefore cannot be given to any creature, Angel or ſaint. This I have proved from ſcripture, where our Saviour commands us, *when we pray*, *to ſay*, *Our Father which art in heaven*; that is, to direct and addreſs our prayers to God only. And St. *Paul* likewiſe forbids *the worſhipping Angels*, by invocating of them, and making uſe of them as *mediators* between God and us, in his epiſtle to the *Coloſſians*; which *Theodoret* expreſly interprets concerning the invocation of Angels, and applying ourſelves to them, as *mediators* and *interceſſors* with God in heaven for us. And the Council of *Laodicea* declares this practice to be idolatry. Beſides, that the ancient fathers of the chriſtian church, for above three hundred years, never ſpake of praying to any, but God only; and do expreſly condemn the invocation of Angels, much more of the ſaints, who are inferior to them; and therefore they always define *prayer* to be *an addreſs to God*, *a converſing and diſcourſing with God*; which would be a falſe definition of prayer, if it were lawful to pray to any but to God only. All which conſidered, one may juſtly wonder at the confidence of ſome men, who would have it taken for granted, without any proof, that the invocation of ſaints and Angels is lawful.

(2.) If it were true, that it is lawful to pray to Angels and ſaints; it is not true, that the church of *Rome* does only declare it to be lawful, but does not require and enjoin it, as ſome of their late writers pretend.

With what face can this be ſaid, when there are ſo many prayers to Angels and ſaints, and eſpecially to the bleſſed Virgin, in the *publick offices* of their church, in which all are ſuppoſed to join, as much as in the prayers which are put up to God by the prieſt? 'Tis true, indeed, the people underſtand neither; but they are preſent at both, and join in both alike; that is, as much as men can be ſaid to join in that which they do not underſtand; as that church ſuppoſeth people may do, and receive great edification alſo, by joining with the prieſt, in a ſervice which they do not underſtand. But how they can be edified by what they do not underſtand, I muſt confeſs myſelf as little able to underſtand, as they do their prayers. But whether they underſtand them or not, 'tis certain that if the people have any part in the publick prayers of the church, they are bound to pray to Angels and ſaints.

And if the creed of pope *Pius* IV, framed by virtue of an order of the council of *Trent*, be of any authority with them, one of the articles of it is, that *I do firmly hold, that the ſaints which reign together with Chriſt, are to be worſhipped and invocated, and that they do offer up prayers to God for us.* And this creed all the governors of cathedrals and ſuperior churches, and all who hold any dignity, or benefice, with cure of ſouls from them, are bound ſolemnly to make profeſſion of, and ſwear to, and carefully to cauſe it to be held, and taught, and preached by all that are under their charge; ſo that they are to teach the people, *that the ſaints which reign together with Chriſt, are to be worſhipped and prayed to.* And therefore unleſs people are not bound to do that, which they are to be taught it is their duty to do, they are, by virtue of this article, required *to worſhip and pray to ſaints.* And if the *publick office of* their church be *the publick worſhip*, and pope *Pius*'s creed *the publick faith* of the *Romiſh church*, no man can be either of the faith or in the communion of that church, who does not only hold it lawful, but his duty, *to worſhip the ſaints in heaven, and to pray to them*, and accordingly does join in the worſhip of them, and prayers to them, as much as in any other part of divine ſervice.

2. Another pretence for this doctrine and practice is, that the ſaints in heaven do pray for us, and what is this but to be *mediators* and *interceſſors* with God for us? And if

ſo, why may we not pray to them, to intercede with God for us? To this I anſwer *four* things.

(1.) We do not deny that the ſaints in heaven pray for us that are here upon earth, becauſe they may do ſo, for any thing we know; but that they do ſo, is more than can be proved, either by clear teſtimony of ſcripture, or by any convincing argument from reaſon, and therefore no doctrine or practice can be ſafely grounded upon it.

(2.) Tho' it were certain, that the ſaints in heaven do pray for us; yet they are not *mediators* and *interceſſors*, properly ſo called: For all *interceſſion* ſtrictly and properly ſo called, is in virtue of a *ſacrifice* offered by him that intercedes; and therefore he only by whom expiation of ſin is made upon earth, can be properly *an interceſſor* with God in heaven; but this, no Angel or ſaint hath done, nor can do.

And (as I have ſhewed in ſome of the former diſcourſes) it is the plain ſcope of a great part of the epiſtle to the *Hebrews* to prove this very thing, that under the Goſpel *we have an high-prieſt that lives for ever, and appears in the preſence of God for us*, in the virtue of *that blood which he ſhed, and that ſacrifice which he offered upon the croſs for the expiation of ſin*: And that *by this high-prieſt only we have acceſs, with freedom and confidence to the throne of grace*, and by him do offer up all our prayers and thankſgivings and all other acts of religious worſhip to God: And this the Apoſtle ſhews was typify'd, in an imperfect manner, by the *Jewiſh high-prieſt* under the law, who was but *one*, and none but *he only could enter into the holy of holies, with the blood of the ſacrifices, that were ſlain and burnt without, by which blood he made an atonement, and interceded for the people*; and though every prieſt might pray for the people, and the people for one another, which is a kind of *interceſſion*; yet that peculiar kind of *interceſſion*, which was performed by the *high-prieſt* in *the holy of holies*, in virtue of *the ſacrifice* that was ſlain without, could not be made, but by *the high-prieſt only*. By all which was typify'd *our high-prieſt* under the Goſpel, *who only hath made expiation of ſin, by the ſacrifice of himſelf, and is enter'd into heaven, to appear in the preſence of God for us, where he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us*, in virtue of *that blood which was ſhed* for the expiation of ſin, and which can only be preſented to God by him that ſhed it. And this is properly interceſſion, like that of *the high-prieſt* under the law for the people of *Iſrael*; and this kind of *interceſſion* can be made by none in heaven for us, but only by *the high-prieſt of our profeſſion, Jeſus the Son of God*, and by none elſe can we offer up our prayers and ſervices to God; and conſequently we cannot addreſs ourſelves to any other, Angels or ſaints, as *mediators* with God for us.

(3.) Suppoſing it certain, that the ſaints do pray for us; yet we may not addreſs ſolemn prayer to them to pray for us, becauſe prayer and ſolemn invocation is a part of that religious worſhip which is peculiar to God.

(4.) Suppoſing it not only certain, that the ſaints in heaven do pray for us, but likewiſe that they might be proper *mediators* and *interceſſors* with God for us, yet we ought not to pray to them, becauſe they cannot hear us, as I ſhall have occaſion to ſhew fully by and by.

Another of their pretences or excuſes for this practice is, that praying to ſaints to pray for us, is no more than what we do to good men upon earth, when we deſire them to pray for us. So the late *expounder of the catholick faith*, namely the Biſhop of *Meaux*, tells us, *that they pray to the ſaints in heaven, in the ſame order of brotherly ſociety with which we intreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us*.

But that this is not a true repreſentation either of their doctrine or practice in this matter will appear by theſe following conſiderations.

(1.) That they pray to the Angels and ſaints in heaven with the ſame ſolemn circumſtances of religious worſhip that they pray to God himſelf, in the ſame place, and in the ſame humble poſture, and in the ſame religious offices and ſervices, in which they pray to God; which ſurely is never done by any to their *brethren upon earth*.

(2.) That in their prayers and thankſgivings, they join the Angels and the bleſſed Virgin and the ſaints together with God and Chriſt, as if (to uſe their own phraſe) it were *in the ſame order of brotherly ſociety*, and as if they were all equally the objects of our invocation and praiſe; of which, in my laſt diſcourſe, I gave ſeveral plain inſtances; but this alſo is never done to *our brethren upon earth*.

(3.) That in the creed of pope *Pius* IV. it is expreſly ſaid, *That the ſaints which reign together with Chriſt, are to be worſhipped and invocated*; but this ſurely they will not allow to be done to *our brethren upon earth.* And the *council of Trent* does expreſly ground the worſhip and invocation of ſaints, upon *their reigning with Chriſt in heaven*; and therefore this worſhip and invocation of ſaints muſt neceſſarily be ſomething more, than *according to the ſame order of brotherly ſociety, with which we intreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us:* Otherwiſe the reaſon given by the council of *their reigning with Chriſt in heaven*, would be frivolous, if the ſame thing may be done *to our brethren upon earth.*

(4.) In the publick offices of their church, they do not only pray to the ſaints to pray for them, but they direct their prayers and thanksgivings immediately to them, for all thoſe bleſſings and benefits which they ask of God, and thank him for. Of which innumerable examples might be given out of their publick offices; particularly in the *office of the bleſſed Virgin*, they pray to the Angels thus; *Deliver us, we beſeech you, by your command, from all our ſins.*

And the words of the decree of *the council of Trent*, [*ad eorum orationes, opem, auxiliumque confugere*, to flee to their prayers, aid, and help,] unleſs we will make them a mere tautology, muſt of neceſſity ſignify ſomething more than begging of them to pray for us. And indeed, thoſe words of their *aid* and *help*, ſeem to be added on purpoſe to give countenance to thoſe direct prayers which are made to the ſaints, for all ſpiritual and temporal bleſſings, and which ſtill remain without any change in their publick offices; and unleſs we will underſtand them contrary to the plain and obvious ſenſe of thoſe prayers, they muſt ſignify ſomething more than praying to the ſaints to pray for us.

'Tis true, indeed, that the *Catechiſm* which was framed by order of the *council of Trent*, for the explaining of their doctrines, makes the difference between their Prayers to God, and to the ſaints, to lie in this, that *we ſay to God, Have mercy on us, or hear our prayers*; *but to the ſaints, Pray for us.* But I have ſhewn before, that this is not the conſtant form of praying to ſaints, but that frequently they make direct addreſſes to them for their help and aid. And this the compilers of the *Catechiſm* were ſenſible of, and therefore they add, *although it be lawful in another manner to ask of the ſaints themſelves, that they would have mercy on us*; *becauſe they are very merciful.* And is not God ſo too? And then where is the difference between their prayers to God, and to the ſaints? If it neither lie in the *matter* of them, nor in the *form*, nor in the *reaſon* of them; if we pray to them for the ſame thing, and in the ſame form, *Have mercy on us*, and our prayers to them be grounded upon the ſame reaſon that our prayers to God are, namely, *becauſe they are merciful*; where then is the difference between them?

4. I will mention but one pretence more, which is, that by praying to the ſaints in heaven, they do not make them Gods; and therefore there can be no ſuſpicion or danger of idolatry in the caſe.

To this I ſhall anſwer *two things.*

(1.) That praying to them in all places, and at all times, and for all ſorts of bleſſings, does ſuppoſe them to have the incommunicable perfections of the divine nature imparted to them, or inherent in them, namely his omnipotence, and omniſcience, and immenſe preſence; and to whatever being we aſcribe theſe perfections, in ſo doing we make it God; for prayer to God is no otherwiſe an acknowledgment of his omnipotence, omniſcience, and immenſe preſence, than as we do in all places, and at all times, pray to him for all things; and ſo they do to the ſaints, and that not only with vocal but with mental prayer, which *the council of Trent* allows, and in ſo doing, neceſſarily ſuppoſeth them to know our hearts, directly contrary to the reaſon which *Solomon* gives, why we ſhould put up all our prayers and ſupplications to God (1 *Kings* viii. 39.) *for thou, even thou only, knoweſt the hearts of all the children of men.*

(2.) *Bellarmine* is ſo ſenſible of the dint of this argument, that he is forced to acknowledge *the ſaints which reign with Chriſt in heaven to be Gods by participation* (that is, a ſort of inferior Gods, as the heathen ſuppoſed their mediators to be) *and that therefore we may fly to their aid and help, as well as to their interceſſion and prayers.* And is this alſo to pray to the ſaints in heaven, *in the ſame order of brotherly ſociety, with which we intreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us?* This methinks is great familiarity, to treat *Gods by participation*, juſt in the ſame manner as we do *our brethren upon earth.* Certainly either *Bellarmine* hath raiſed the ſaints in heaven too high, when he makes them *Gods by participation*; or the biſhop of *Meaux* hath ſunk them too low, when he thinks they are to be treated and addreſſed to, *in the ſame rank of brotherly ſociety, with mortal men here upon earth.*

One cannot but think the decree of *the council of Trent* to be very obſcure and ambiguous, when it can admit of two ſo very different explications. If *the infallible judge of controverſies* can ſpeak no plainer; I think we had even beſt ſtick to *the Bible*, and hear what *God* ſays in his Word, and endeavour to underſtand it as well as we can.

I proceed now to the *fourth* thing which I propoſed, namely to ſhew that this practice of theirs, of addreſſing ourſelves to Angels and ſaints, and making uſe of their mediation, to offer up our prayers and thankſgivings to God, is not only needleſs, being no where commanded by God; but *uſeleſs alſo*, and unprofitable.

They are ſo far from pretending, that it is *commanded by God*, that ſeveral of their later writers would fain make us believe that it is not *enjoined* by their *councils*; but only declared to be lawful, or at moſt, but recommended as profitable. Nor is there any example of praying to ſaints, either in the Old or New Teſtament; Not in the Old (as they of the church of *Rome* confeſs) *becauſe the ſaints were not then admitted into heaven*; nor in the New, *for fear of ſcandalizing the Jews, and of making the Gentiles think they propoſed new Gods, and new mediators to them, inſtead of the old*; which are the reaſons given by their own writers.

And it is *needleſs* likewiſe; becauſe the mediation of Jeſus Chriſt alone is ſufficient for us, and more than the interceſſion of millions of ſaints and Angels. *He* alone *is able to ſave to the utmoſt all thoſe that come to God by him*, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* ſpeaks. Hath not he made a clear and full promiſe to us, that *whatever we ask in his name ſhall be granted us?* And have we any reaſon to doubt, either of his inclination and good-will, or of his power and intereſt to do us good? What need then is there to ſue for the favour, or to take in the aſſiſtance of any other, even of thoſe who are thought to be moſt powerful, and the chief miniſters and favourites in that heavenly court? After ſuch an aſſurance that my buſineſs will be effectually done there, by that great *advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous*; why ſhould I apply myſelf to St. *Peter*, though he be ſaid to keep the keys of heaven; or to *Michael* the Archangel, though he be *the chief of the miniſtring ſpirits*; or to *the bleſſed Virgin* herſelf, notwithſtanding thoſe glorious titles of the *Queen of Heaven*, and *the Mother of Mercy*, which they of the church of *Rome* are pleaſed to beſtow upon her, without her conſent, and as may reaſonaby be preſumed, againſt her will.

I will put a caſe, which may help to render this matter a little more plain and ſenſible to us, ſo as every man may be able to judge of it. Suppoſe a king ſhould conſtitute his ſon, *the great maſter of requeſts*; with this expreſs declaration and aſſurance, that all petitions that were addreſs'd to him by his ſon, ſhould be graciouſly received and anſwered; in this caſe tho' every man might uſe his own diſcretion, at his own peril, and take what courſe he pleaſed, yet I ſhould moſt certainly prefer all my petitions to the king, in the way which he had ſo plainly directed, and ſhould trouble never a courtier of them all with my buſineſs; for fear the king ſhould think, that I did either diſtruſt his royal word, or deſpiſe his ſon, by my ſoliciting the aid and help of every little courtier, after I had put my petition into the hands of this *great maſter of requeſts*.

And now I will not diſtruſt any of your underſtandings ſo far as to make the application. I will only add, that it is an eternal rule of truth, and which never fails in any caſe, *Fruſtra fit per plura quod fieri poteſt per pauciora, it is in vain to attempt that by more ways and means which may as well and as effectually be done by one*; becauſe this would be perfect loſs of time and pains: And therefore they who would ſend us ſo far about, as to trouble all the ſaints and Angels in heaven with our petitions, when they cannot deny but that *our great mediator* is alone ſufficient; do ſeem to me to ſend us upon a very ſleeveleſs errand; ſo that if with all their ſkill in fencing, they could defend this practice from being *unlawful*, yet this one thing is a ſufficient objection in reaſon againſt it, that it is perfectly *needleſs*.

Or if we could imagine any *need* of this; all addreſſes to them muſt be *vain* and *unprofitable*, if they do not know our wants, and hear our prayers that are put up to them; which St. *Auguſtin* thought they do not know and hear, *Fatendum eſt* (ſaith he *Lib. De Curâ pro mortuis*) *ne ſcire quidem mortuos, quid hic agatur*; *it muſt be acknowledged that the dead are ignorant of what is done here.* This was his opinion; but we are certain that they cannot know our wants, nor hear our prayers at all times and in all places; unleſs they can either be preſent every where, which no finite being can be; or elſe God be pleaſed in ſome ſupernatural way to communicate to them the knowledge of our wants, and of the prayers which we put up to them; which we can never know that he does, unleſs he hath communicated to us, that he is pleaſed to do ſo, of which the ſcripture no where gives us the leaſt intimation.

But becauſe they pretend, that the ſcripture gives us ſome hints of this, I ſhall briefly examine what they ſay about this matter.

I. That the Angels know our condition here below, becauſe they are ſaid *to rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner*; and therefore the ſaints do likewiſe know our condition, becauſe *they ſhall be like the Angels.* But this is not ſaid of them till after the reſurrection, when we ſhall have no occaſion to pray to them. Beſides, that it may well enough be ſuppoſed, that God may reveal both to the Angels and ſaints in heaven, the converſion of a ſinner, becauſe it may contribute to the increaſe of their joy and happineſs: But will it hence follow, that God reveals to them all other circumſtances of our condition, our dangers and temptations and troubles, our ſins and our ſufferings, the knowledge whereof would no ways contribute to the increaſe of their happineſs? And yet in order to their interceſſion with God for us, their knowledge of theſe things would be moſt beneficial to us.

II. Becauſe *the rich man* was concerned in hell for the ſalvation of his relations on earth, they argue that it is much more probable, that the ſaints in heaven are concerned for us, and are ready to pray for us, and therefore it is very credible, that ſome way or other, they have the knowledge of our condition and wants, though we cannot certainly tell, what that particular way is.

To which I anſwer.

(1.) That it is a known rule amongſt all divines, that no certain argument can be drawn from the circumſtances of a parable, but only from the main ſcope and intention of it; nor is it ſo likely that the wicked in hell ſhould have any ſhare in *that*, which St. *Paul* tells us, is the great virtue of the ſaints in heaven, I mean *charity*; and if they have it not, then no argument can be drawn from it. Some of their commentators think, that this motion of *the rich man* to *Abraham* concerning his brethren, did not proceed from charity to *them*, but to *himſelf*; leſt his torment and puniſhment ſhould be increaſed by their coming to hell, by the means of the ill example which he had given them when he was upon earth; and cardinal *Cajetan* thinks that he was concerned for his brethren out of pride and ambition, and becauſe it would be for the honour of his family, to have ſome of them in that glory (ſo far above any thing in this world) which he ſaw *Abraham* and *Lazarus* poſſeſs'd of. This is a reaſon, which I confeſs I ſhould not have thought on; and yet perhaps it might be likely enough to enter into the mind of *a cardinal.* And I cannot but obſerve by the way, that this petition or requeſt, which *the rich man* in hell made to *Abraham*, is the only inſtance we meet with in ſcripture, of any thing like a prayer that was put up to any of the ſaints in heaven.

Well! But ſuppoſe that the *rich man* in hell had this charity for his brethren, and we will eaſily agree, that the ſaints in heaven have much more charity, not only for their kindred, but for all men here upon earth; let us now conſider the particular way and manner which *the great divines* of the church of *Rome* (I mean the *ſchoolmen*, who cannot be content to be ignorant of any thing) do aſſign of the knowledge which the ſaints in heaven have of the condition and wants of men here below.

They tell us that they know all our prayers and wants in the glaſs of the deity, or trinity; which metaphor *of the glaſs of the deity, or trinity*, if it have any meaning, it muſt be this, that the ſaints in heaven beholding the face of God or the divine eſſence, in which the knowledge of all things is contained, they may in that glaſs ſee all things that God knows: But then they ſpoil all this fine ſpeculation again, by telling us, that this glaſs does not *neceſſarily* repreſent to them all that knowledge which is in the divine mind; but that it is a kind of *voluntary* glaſs, in which the ſaints are only permitted to ſee ſo much as God pleaſeth; but how much that is, they cannot tell us. Which amounts to no more than this, that the ſaints in heaven know as much of our condition here upon earth, as God is pleaſed to reveal to them: And if this be all, it is as good a reaſon why we ſhould pray to good men in the *Eaſt* or *Weſt-Indies*, to pray for us and help us, becauſe they alſo know as much of our neceſſities, and prayers, as God thinks fit to reveal to them.

But if the ſaints muſt have a revelation from God of our prayers, before that they know that we pray to them: then the ſhorteſt and ſureſt way both, is to pray to God and not to them; or however (as *Bellarmine* confeſſeth) it were very fit to pray to God, before every prayer we make to the ſaints, that he would be pleaſed to reveal that prayer to them, that upon this ſignal and notice given them by God, they may betake themſelves to pray to God for us. But unleſs it were very clear from ſcripture, that God had appointed this method, it is in reaſon ſuch a way about, as no man would take that could help it: And it ſeems to me to as little purpoſe; for why ſhould not a man think God as ready to grant him all his other requeſts, without the mediation and interceſſion of ſaints, as this one requeſt of *revealing our prayers and wants to them?* And if this way be not thought ſo convenient, I know but one more, and that is, to pray to the ſaints to go to God, and beg of him, that he would be pleaſed to reveal to them our ſupplications and wants, that they may know what to pray to him for in our behalf; which is juſt ſuch a wiſe courſe, as if a man ſhould write a letter to his friend that cannot read, and in a poſtſcript deſire him, that as ſoon as he hath received it, he would carry it to one that can read, and intreat him to read it to him. So that which way ſoever we put the caſe, what courſe ſoever we take in this matter, it will be ſo far from ſeeming reaſonable, that we ſhall have much ado, and muſt handle the buſineſs very tenderly to hinder it from appearing very ridiculous.

Thus I have examined their chief pretences from ſcripture, for the countenancing this doctrine and practice, and have ſhewn how little, or rather nothing at all is there to be found for it; and that alone is reaſon enough againſt it, though there were nothing in ſcripture againſt it, that there is nothing in ſcripture for it: But I have already produced clear proof out of the New Teſtament againſt it: And becauſe they think the leaſt ſhew and probability from ſcripture a good argument on their ſide, I will offer them a probable argument out of the Old Teſtament, upon which, though I will lay no abſolute ſtreſs, yet I believe it would puzzle them, upon their principles, to give a clear anſwer to it; and it is from 2 *Kings* ii. 9. where *Elijah* juſt before he was taken up into heaven, ſays to *Eliſha*, *Ask what I ſhall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee*; thereby intimating (as one would think) that then was the laſt opportunity of asking any thing of him: But if *Elijah* had underſtood the matter right (as the church of *Rome* does now) he ſhould rather have directed him, to have prayed to him, when he was in heaven, where he would have a more powerful intereſt, and be in a better capacity to do him a kindneſs. For the reaſon the church of *Rome* gives, why they did not pray to the ſaints under the Old Teſtament (namely, becauſe they were not then admitted into heaven) will not hold in the caſe of *Elijah*, who was taken up into heaven body and ſoul, and conſequently in as good circumſtances to be prayed to, as any of the ſaints and martyrs that have gone to heaven ſince.

I ſhould now have proceeded in the *fifth* and *laſt* place, to have ſhewn, that this practice is not only needleſs and uſeleſs, but very dangerous and impious; becauſe contrary to the chriſtian religion, and greatly derogating from the merit and virtue of Chriſt's ſacrifice, and from the honour of *the only mediator between God and men, Chriſt Jeſus*. And indeed how can we apply ourſelves to any other mediators and interceſſors with God in heaven for us, without a groſs and apparent contempt of the *high-prieſt of our profeſſion, Jeſus the Son of God?* As if we either diſtruſted his kindneſs and affection, or his power and intereſt in heaven, to obtain at God's hand all thoſe bleſſings which we ſtand in need of. The Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us expreſly, that *he is able to ſave to the utmoſt all thoſe that come to God by him*; that is, who addreſs their prayers and ſupplications to God in his name and mediation. But if we will chooſe other mediators for ourſelves, of whom we are not ſure that they can either hear or help us, we may fall ſhort of that ſalvation, which the Apoſtle tells us we are ſecure of by the mediation of Jeſus Chriſt; *for he is able*, &c.

But this hath been ſhewn ſo abundantly in the former part of this diſcourſe, and is ſo clearly conſequent from the whole, that I ſhall here conclude my diſcourſe upon the *ſecond propoſition* I laid down from the words of my text, *viz. That there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus.*

As to the *third propoſition* contained in the text, *viz. That this one mediator Jeſus Chriſt, gave himſelf a ranſom for all*, I have treated on that ſubject particularly on another * occaſion.

* *A Sermon concerning the* Sacrifice *and* Satisfaction *of Chriſt. Printed in the year* 1693.

And as to the *fourth* and *laſt* propoſition, *viz. That the mediation or interceſſion of Jeſus Chriſt is founded in his redemption of mankind; and becauſe he gave himſelf a ranſom for all, therefore he and he only is qualified to intercede for all men, in* *virtue of that ſacrifice which he offered for the ſalvation of mankind*; I judge nothing more needful to be added, to what has fallen in concerning that ſubject, in my handling the *ſecond propoſition*, in this and the two former ſermons.

SERMON XX.

Preach'd on Aſcenſion-Day, 1688.

The general and effectual Publication of the Goſpel by the Apoſtles.

MARK. xvi. 19, 20.

So then after the Lord had ſpoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and ſat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with ſigns following.

IN theſe words you have theſe two great points of chriſtian doctrine.

I. Our ſaviour's aſcenſion into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; *he was received up into heaven, and ſat on the right hand of God.*

II. The effect or conſequence of his aſcenſion and exaltation, which was the general and effectual publication of the Goſpel; *they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with ſigns following.* And both theſe are very proper for this day; but I ſhall at this time handle the *latter point*, namely, the effect or conſequence of our Saviour's aſcenſion into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; *they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with ſigns following.*

And theſe words contain two things in them.

I. The general publication of the Goſpel by the Apoſtles; *they went forth and preached every where.*

II. The reaſon of the great efficacy and ſucceſs of it; namely, the divine and miraculous power, which accompanied the preaching of it; *The Lord wrought with them, and confirmed the word with ſigns following.*

I. The general publication of the Goſpel by the Apoſtles; *They went forth and preached every where.* And, indeed, the induſtry of the Apoſtles, and the other diſciples, in publiſhing the Goſpel, was almoſt incredible. What pains did they take? what hazards did they run? what difficulties and diſcouragements did they contend withal in this work? And yet their ſucceſs was greater than their induſtry, and beyond all human expectation: As will appear, if we conſider theſe *five* things.

1. The *vaſt ſpreading* of the Goſpel in ſo ſhort a ſpace.

2. The *wonderful power* and *efficacy* of it upon the lives and manners of men.

3. The *weakneſs* and *meanneſs* of the inſtruments that were employed in this great work.

4. The *powerful oppoſition* that was raiſed againſt it.

5. The *great diſcouragements* to the embracing the profeſſion of it. I ſhall ſpeak briefly to each of theſe.

1. The *vaſt ſpreading* of the Goſpel in ſo ſhort a ſpace. This is repreſented *Rev.* xiv. 6. by *an Angel flying through the midſt of heaven, and preaching the everlaſting Goſpel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.* No ſooner was the doctrine of the chriſtian religion publiſhed, and made known to the world, but it was readily embraced by great numbers, almoſt in all places where it came. And, indeed, ſo it was foretold in the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, *Gen.* xlix. 10. *That when Shiloh*

(that is the *Meſſias*) *ſhould come, to him ſhould the gathering of the people be:* And *Iſa.* ii. 2. *That in the laſt days the mountain of the Lord's houſe ſhould be eſtabliſhed in the top of the mountains, and be exalted above the hills, and that all nations, ſhould flow unto it. Iſa.* lx. 8. the prophet ſpeaking of mens ready ſubmiſſion to the the Goſpel, and the great number of thoſe that ſhould come in upon the preaching of it, they are ſaid *to fly as a cloud, and as the doves to the windows.*

So quick and ſtrange a progreſs did this new doctrine and religion make in the world, that in the ſpace of about thirty years after our Saviour's death, it was not only diffuſed through the greateſt part of the *Roman* empire, but had reached as far as *Parthia* and *India.* In which we ſee our Saviour's prediction fully verified, that before the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem,* the Goſpel ſhould be preached in all the world, *Matth.* xxiv. 14. *This Goſpel of the kingdom ſhall be preached in all the world, for a witneſs unto all nations, and then ſhall the end come.* But this is not all; men were not only brought into the profeſſion of the Goſpel; but,

2. This doctrine had likewiſe a *wonderful power* and *efficacy* upon the lives and manners of men. The generality of thoſe that entertained the Goſpel, *were obedient* to it *in word and deed,* as the Apoſtle tells us, concerning the *Gentiles* that were converted to *chriſtianity,* Rom. xv. 18. Upon the change of their religion, followed alſo the change of their manners, of their former courſe of life. They that took upon them the profeſſion of chriſtianity, *did thenceforth not walk as other Gentiles did, in the luſts of the fleſh, and according to the vicious courſe of the world; but did put off, concerning their former converſation, the old man, which was corrupt, according to the deceitful luſts; and were renewed in the ſpirit of their mind, and did put on the new man, which after God was created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs.* So ſtrange an effect had the Goſpel upon the lives of the generality of the profeſſors of it, that I remember *Tertullian,* in his apology to the *Roman* emperor and ſenate, challengeth them to inſtance in any one that bore the title of *Chriſtian,* that was condemned as a thief, or a murderer, or a ſacrilegious perſon, or that was guilty of any of thoſe groſs enormities, for which ſo many *Pagans* were every day made examples of publick juſtice, and puniſhed and executed among them.

And this certainly was a very admirable and happy effect, which the Goſpel had upon men, to work ſo great and ſudden a change in the lives of thoſe who entertained this doctrine, to take them quite off from thoſe vicious practices which they had been brought up in and accuſtomed to; to change their ſpirits, and the temper of their minds; and of lewd and diſhoneſt, to make them ſober and juſt, and *holy in all manner of converſation*; of proud and fierce, contentious and paſſionate, malicious and revengeful, to make them humble and meek, kind and tender-hearted, peaceable and charitable.

And that the primitive Chriſtians were generally good men, and of virtuous lives, is credible, becauſe their religion did teach and oblige them to be ſuch; which, though it be not effectual now, to make all the profeſſors of it ſuch, as it requires they ſhould be, yet it was a very forcible argument then, in the circumſtances in which the primitive Chriſtians were: For chriſtianity was a hated and perſecuted profeſſion: No man could then have any inducement to embrace it, unleſs he were reſolved to practiſe it, and live according to the rules of it; for it offered men no rewards and advantages in this world; but, on the contrary, threatned men with the greateſt temporal inconveniencies and ſufferings; and it promiſed no happineſs to men in the other world upon any other terms, than of *denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts,* and of *living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.*

And beſides this conſideration, we have the beſt teſtimony in the world of their unblameable lives, *viz.* the teſtimony of their profeſſed enemies, who did not perſecute them for any perſonal crimes, which they charged particular perſons withal, but only for their religion, acknowledging them otherwiſe to be very innocent and good people. Particularly *Pliny,* in his letter to *Trajan* the emperor (who had given him in charge, to make particular enquiry concerning the Chriſtians) gives this honourable report of them, *That there was no fault to be found in them, beſides, their obſtinate refuſal to ſacrifice to the Gods, that at their religious meetings it was an eſſential part of their worſhip to oblige themſelves by a ſolemn ſacrament, againſt murder, and theft, and adultery, and all manner of wickedneſs and vice.* No chriſtian hiſtorian could have given a better character of them than this heathen writer does. But,

3. The *ſucceſs* of the Goſpel will appear yet more ſtrange, if we conſider the *weakneſs* and *meanneſs* of the inſtruments that were employed in this great work. A company of plain and illiterate men, moſt of them deſtitute of the advantages of education, went forth upon this great deſign, weak and unarmed, unaſſiſted by any worldly intereſt, having no ſecular force and power on their ſide, to give countenance and authority to them; and this not only at their firſt ſetting out, but they remained under theſe diſadvantages for three ages together.

The firſt publiſhers of the chriſtian religion offered violence to no man; did not go about to compel any by force to entertain the doctrine which they preached, and to liſt themſelves of their number: They were not attended with legions of armed men to diſpoſe men for the reception of their doctrine, by plunder and free-quarter, by violence and tortures: This modern method of converſion was not then thought of; nor did they go about to attempt and allure men to their way, by the promiſes of temporal rewards, and by the hopes of riches and honours; nor did they uſe any artificial inſinuations of wit and eloquence to gain upon the minds of men, and ſteal their doctrines into them; but delivered themſelves with the greateſt plainneſs and ſimplicity; and without any ſtudied ornaments of ſpeech, or fine arts of perſuaſion, declared plainly to them the doctrine and miracles, the life, and death, and reſurrection of *Jeſus Chriſt*, promiſing life and immortality to them that did believe and obey his doctrine, and threatning eternal woe and miſery in another world to the deſpiſers of it.

And yet theſe contemptible inſtruments, notwithſtanding all theſe diſadvantages, did their work effectually, and, by the power of God going along with them, gained numbers every day to their religion, and in a ſhort ſpace *drew the world after them.*

Nor did they only win over the common people, but alſo ſeveral perſons conſiderable for their dignity, and eminent for their learning, who afterwards became zealous aſſertors of chriſtianity, and were not aſhamed to be inſtructed in the ſaving knowledge of the Goſpel, by ſuch mean and unlearned perſons as the Apoſtles were, for they ſaw ſomething in them more divine, and which carried with it a greater power and perſuaſion than human learning and eloquence.

4. We will conſider the *mighty oppoſition* that was raiſed againſt the Goſpel. At its firſt appearance it could not be otherwiſe, but that it muſt meet with a great deal of difficulty and oppoſition, from the luſts and vices of men, which it did ſo plainly and ſo ſeverely declare againſt, and likewiſe from the prejudices of men that had been brought up in a contrary religion; no prejudice being ſo ſtrong as that which is founded in education; and of all the prejudices of education, none ſo obſtinate and ſo hard to be removed, as thoſe about religion, yea, though they be never ſo abſurd and unreaſonable: *Hath a nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods?* Men are very hardly brought off from the religion which they have been brought up in, how little ground and reaſon ſoever there be for it; the being trained up in it, and having a reverence for it implanted in them in their tender years, ſupplies all other defects.

Had men been free and indifferent in religion, when chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world, and had they not had their minds prepoſſeſſed with other apprehenſions of God and religion, and been inured to rites and ſuperſtitions of a quite different nature from the chriſtian religion; or had they at that time been weary of the ſuperſtitions of their idolatrous worſhip, and been enquiring after a better way of religion; then, indeed, the chriſtian religion had appeared with great advantage, and would in all probability have been entertained with a readineſs of mind proportionable to the reaſonableneſs of it. But this was not the caſe: When the doctrine of the Goſpel was firſt publiſhed in the world, the whole world, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were violently prejudiced againſt it, and fixed in their ſeveral religions.

The *Jews* indeed in former times had been very prone to relinquiſh the worſhip of the true God, and to fall into the heathen idolatry: But after God had puniſhed them ſeverely for that ſin, by a long captivity, they continued ever after, very ſtrict and firm to the worſhip of the true God; and never were they more tenacious of their religion and law, than at that very time when our Saviour appeared in the world: And though *he* was foretold in their law, and moſt particularly deſcribed, in the authentic books of their religion, the prophets of the Old Teſtament; yet by reaſon of certain groundleſs traditions, which they had received from the interpreters of their law, that their *Meſſias* was to be a great temporal prince, they conceived an invincible prejudice againſt our Saviour, upon account of the mean circumſtances in which he appeared; and upon this prejudice they rejected him, and put him to death, and perſecuted his followers: And though their religion was much nearer to the chriſtian, than any of the heathen idolatries; yet upon this account, of our Saviour's mean appearance, they were much more averſe to the entertainment of it, than the groſſeſt idolaters among the nations.

Not but that *their* prejudice alſo was very great; the common people being ſtrongly addicted to the idolatry and ſuperſtitions of their ſeveral countries; and the wiſer, and more learned (whom they call'd *philoſophers*) were ſo puff'd up with a conceit of their own knowledge and eloquence, that they deſpiſed the rudeneſs and ſimplicity of the Apoſtles, and look'd upon their doctrine of a *crucified Saviour*, as ridiculous, and the ſtory of *his reſurrection from the dead*, as abſurd and impoſſible. So St. *Paul* tells us, *that the croſs of Chriſt was to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs.*

But beſides the *oppoſition* which the Goſpel met withal, from the luſts and prejudices of men, the powers of the world did likewiſe ſtrongly combine againſt it. Among the *Jews*, the chief-prieſts and rulers did, with all their force and malice, endeavour to ſtifle it in the birth, and to ſuppreſs it in its firſt riſe; and ſeveral of the *Roman* emperors, who were then the great governors of the world, engaged all their authority, and their whole ſtrength, for the extirpation of it, and raiſed ſuch a ſtorm of perſecution againſt it, as ſwept away greater numbers of mankind than any famine, or plague, or war that ever was in the *Roman* empire: And yet this religion bore up againſt all this *oppoſition*, and made its way through all the reſiſtance, that the luſts and prejudices of men, armed with the power and authority of the whole world, could make againſt it. And this brings me to the

5. And laſt conſideration I mentioned, *the great diſcouragement* that was given to the entrance of this religion.

There was nothing left to invite and engage men to it, but the conſideration of *another world*; for all the evils of *this world* threatened every one that took the profeſſion of chriſtianity upon him. Whoever was known to be a Chriſtian, was liable to reproach and ruin, to cruel mockings and ſcourgings, to baniſhment, or impriſonment and confiſcation of eſtate; but theſe were ſlight and tolerable evils, in compariſon of others that were commonly inflicted upon them; they were condemned to the mines, and to the lions, and all imaginable cruelties were exerciſed upon them; the moſt exquiſite torments that could be deviſed, and death in all its fearful ſhapes was preſented to them, to deter men from embracing this religion, and to tempt them to quit it: And yet they perſiſted in the profeſſion of their religion, and for the ſake of it, did not only *take joyfully the ſpoiling of their goods*, but the moſt barbarous uſage of their *perſons*; and demeaned themſelves not only with patience and courage, but with exultation and triumph, under thoſe tortures which no man can hear or read of, without horror: And they did not only bear up thus manfully, for one brunt; but when theſe violent perſecutions were renewed and repeated upon them, chriſtianity ſupported itſelf under all theſe daunting diſcouragements for almoſt three hundred years, and held out, till the very malice of their perſecutors was out of breath, and their cruelty had tired itſelf.

Nay it did not only *ſupport itſelf*, under all theſe *oppoſitions*, but *grew* and *proſpered*, and *the blood of martyrs became the ſeed of the Church*, and Chriſtians ſprang up faſter, than any perſecution could mow them down: For men by degrees became curious to inquire into the cauſe of ſuch ſufferings, and the reaſon of ſo much conſtancy and patience under them; and upon inquiry were ſatisfied, and became Chriſtians themſelves; and many times their very perſecutors, were ready to ſacrifice their lives the next day, for that very cauſe for which but the day before, they had put others to death.

And it cannot here be reaſonably objected, that Chriſtians yielded up themſelves to all theſe ſufferings, upon the ſame account that ſome *brave ſpirits* among the heathen, laid down their lives for their country; namely, out of a deſire of fame, and to perpetuate their names in after-ages; this, I ſay, cannot reaſonably be ſaid in this caſe; becauſe theſe ſufferers were not the great and ambitious ſpirits, the flower and ſelect part of mankind, but the common people, and many of them of the tenderer ſex and age, who have uſually a greater ſenſe of pain than of glory; and yet ſo were they animated by their religion, and tranſported beyond themſelves, as not only to ſubmit, but many times to offer themſelves to thoſe ſufferings, by declaring themſelves to be Chriſtians, when no man accuſed them, and when they knew they ſhould die, for making that profeſſion; ſo that it is harder to juſtify their forwardneſs to ſuffer, than the ſincerity of their ſufferings. Beſides that nothing could be more fooliſh, and unreaſonable, than for men to hope to get a name by ſuffering in a crowd, and to be particularly remembred to poſterity, when they died in ſuch multitudes, that no man knew the names of the greateſt part of the ſufferers.

You ſee then how ſtrongly the Goſpel prevailed, how ſoon this new religion overran the world, how ſuddenly it ſubdued the ſpirits, and changed the manners of men; and by what *mean* and *deſpicable* inſtruments, to all human appearance, this *great* work was done; and how in deſpite of all oppoſition and diſcouragements, it was carried on. Can any one of the falſe religions of the world pretend to have been propagated and eſtabliſh'd in ſuch a manner, merely by their own force, and the evidence and power of truth upon the minds of men; and to have born up and ſuſtained themſelves ſo long under ſuch fierce aſſaults, as chriſtianity hath done?

As for the religion of *Mahomet*, it is famouſly known to have been planted by force at firſt, and to have been maintained in the world, by the ſame violent means. So that great *impoſtor* openly declares, *that he came not to plant his religion by miracles, but the ſword.*

And as for the idolatries of *the heathen*, they came in upon the world by inſenſible degrees, and did not oppoſe the corruptions of men, but grew out of them; and being ſuited to the vicious temper and diſpoſition of mankind, they eaſily gained upon their ignorance and ſuperſtition, by cuſtom and example. They were juſt ſuch a corruption of *natural religion*, in ſuch times of darkneſs and ignorance, and by ſuch inſenſible ſteps, as there hath been ſince, of the *chriſtian religion* in ſome parts of the world, which we all know. But no ſooner did the light of the Goſpel ſhine out upon the world, but the idolatry and ſuperſtition of the heathen fell before it, like *Dagon before the Ark of God*; and tho' it had the power of the world, and countenance of authority on its ſide, yet it was not able to maintain its ground; and no ſooner was that prop taken away, which was the only ſupport of it, but it preſently ſunk and vaniſh'd; it was not driven out of the world by violence and perſecution, but upon the breaking in of ſo great a light, it ſilently withdrew, as being aſhamed of itſelf: And when afterwards the emperor *Julian* endeavour'd to retrieve it, by his wit and authority, and uſed all imaginable arts and ſtratagems, to ſuppreſs and extinguiſh chriſtianity, he was able to effect neither; for the *chriſtian religion* kept its ground, and *paganiſm*, after it had made a little blaze, died with him.

Now to what cauſe ſhall we aſcribe this wonderful ſucceſs and prevalency of the Goſpel in the world; there can but theſe two be imagined; the *excellency* of the chriſtian religion, and the *power and preſence of the divine Spirit* accompanying it.

1. The *excellency* of the chriſtian religion, which both in reſpect of the goodneſs of its precepts, and the aſſurance of its rewards, hath plainly the advantage of any religion, that ever yet appeared in the world. And this is a great advantage indeed: But by this alone it could never have been able to have broken through all that mighty *oppoſition* and *reſiſtance*, which was made againſt it; and therefore that it might be able to encounter this with ſucceſs.

2. God was pleaſed to accompany the firſt preaching of it, with a mighty and ſenſible *preſence and power of his Spirit*. And this brings me to the

Second part of the *text*, the *reaſon* of the *wonderful efficacy* and *ſucceſs*, which the Apoſtles had in the preaching of the Goſpel; *the Lord wrought with them, and confirmed the word with ſigns following*. Which words expreſs to us that miraculous power of the Holy Ghoſt, which accompanied the firſt preaching of the Goſpel; by which I do not intend to exclude *the inward operation* of God's Holy Spirit upon the minds of men, ſecretly moving and inclining thoſe to whom the Goſpel was preached, to embrace and entertain it; which the ſcripture elſewhere ſpeaks frequently of, and may poſſibly be intended in the *firſt* of theſe expreſſions, *the Lord working with them*; and *the latter* may only be meant of *the miraculous gifts* of the Spirit, with regard to which God is ſaid to *confirm the word with ſigns following*, or *accompanying it*. But I rather think they are *both* intended to expreſs the ſame thing, and that *the latter* is only added by way of explication of *the former*, to ſhew more particularly, how the Lord wrought with them; namely, by giving confirmation to their doctrine, by thoſe miraculous gifts and powers of the Spirit, which they were endowed withal, *the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with ſigns following*; that is, with thoſe miracles, which accompanied the firſt preaching of the Goſpel. For theſe words do plainly refer to the promiſe of the Spirit at the 17th verſe; *and theſe ſigns ſhall follow them that believe*; which is the reaſon why they are here call'd *ſigns following*; that is, miracles which accompanied the word that was preached.

And that this is the full meaning of this *text*, will appear by comparing it with one or two more, *Rom.* xv. 18, 19. where St. *Paul* ſpeaking of *the things which Chriſt had wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient to the Goſpel*, he ſays, *they were done through mighty ſigns and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God*; which is the ſame with that which is ſaid here in the *text*, of *the Lord's working with the Apoſtles, and confirming the word with ſigns following*. So likewiſe *Heb.* ii. 3, 4. the Apoſtle there tells us, that *the Goſpel which was firſt ſpoken by the Lord, was confirmed by them that heard him, God alſo bearing them witneſs, both with ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt*. So that the great confirmation, which is ſaid here to be given to the Goſpel, was by *the miraculous gifts of the Spirit*, which were poured forth upon the Apoſtles and primitive Chriſtians.

In ſpeaking of which, I ſhall briefly do theſe *two* things.

I. Give an account of the *nature* of theſe gifts, and of the *uſe* and *end* to which they ſerved: And then ſhew in the

IId Place, how the Goſpel was *confirmed* by them.

I. For the *nature* of theſe gifts, and the *uſe* and *end* to which they were deſigned.

They are thoſe miraculous powers which by the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, upon the day of *Pentecoſt*, the Apoſtles were endowed withal, to qualify them to publiſh the Goſpel with more ſpeed and ſucceſs. Such was the gift of *ſpeaking divers languages*, and the gift of *interpreting* things ſpoken in divers languages; (and theſe *two gifts* were not neceſſarily united in the ſame perſon, for the Apoſtle tells us, that ſome had the *one*, and ſome the *other*;) the gift of *prophecy* and *foretelling things to come*, which was always a ſign of a perſon divinely inſpired; the miraculous powers of *healing diſeaſes*, of *raiſing the dead*, and *of caſting out devils*, a power of *inflicting corporal diſeaſes, and puniſhments*, upon ſcandalous and obſtinate Chriſtians, who would not ſubmit to the Apoſtles authority and government; which is in ſcripture call'd, *a delivering up to Satan, for the deſtruction*, or tormenting *of the body, that the ſoul may be ſaved*; nay, in ſome caſes, this power extended to *the inflicting of death itſelf*, as in the caſe of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*.

Not that all theſe miraculous powers were given to every one of the Apoſtles, or that they could exerciſe them at all times; ſome were beſtowed upon one, and ſome upon another, according to God's good pleaſure, and as was moſt expedient for the *uſe* and *benefit* of the church, and moſt ſubſervient to thoſe *ends* for which God gave them; only we find that all the Apoſtles had the gift of *tongues*; and that the power of *caſting out devils, in the name of Chriſt*, was common to every Chriſtian, and continued in the church for a long time after the other gifts were ceaſed; as *Tertul. Arnob.* and *Min. Felix* do teſtify, even of their own times.

But II. I ſhall briefly ſhew how the Goſpel was *confirmed* by theſe miraculous gifts.

Now beſides the particular *uſes* and *ends* of thoſe miraculous gifts (as *the gift of tongues*, did evidently ſerve for the more ſpeedy planting and propagating of the chriſtian religion in the world; and the power of *inflicting corporal puniſhments*, in a miraculous manner, upon ſcandalous and diſobedient Chriſtians, did maintain the power and authority of the Apoſtles, and was inſtead of an ordinary magiſtratical power, which Chriſtians were deſtitute of, whilſt the *Roman* empire continued heathen:) I ſay, beſides the particular *ends* and *uſes* of all theſe miraculous gifts, they did all in general, as they were *miracles*, ſerve for the *confirmation* of the Goſpel.

The Apoſtles delivered the doctrine of Chriſt, and were *witneſſes* of his reſurrection from the dead, as *the great miracle*, whereby his doctrine was confirmed; now there was all the reaſon in the world to believe them, to whom God was pleaſed to give ſuch a teſtimony from heaven; for who could make any doubt of the truth of *their* teſtimony, concerning the reſurrection of Chriſt, who were enabled *to raiſe others from the dead*, and by many other *wonderful things* which they did, gave ſuch clear teſtimony, that *God was with them*?

Never had any religion fewer worldly advantages to recommend it, and ſo little temporal countenance and aſſiſtance to carry it on; but what it wanted from *men*, it had from *God*; for *he gave witneſs to it with ſigns and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt*. God ſeems on purpoſe to have ſtript it of all ſecular advantages,

ges, that the chriſtian religion might be perfectly free from all ſuſpicion of worldly intereſt and deſign, and that it might not owe its eſtabliſhment in the world, to the wiſdom and contrivance of *men*, but to the arm and power of *God*.

The *inferences* I ſhall at preſent make from this diſcourſe ſhall be theſe.

I. To give us ſatisfaction of the truth and divinity of the doctrine of the chriſtian religion, which hath had ſo eminent a confirmation given to it from heaven, and did at its firſt ſetting out ſo ſtrangely prevail in the world, againſt all human probability; *not by might, nor by power; but by the Spirit of the Lord.*

No man can well ſuppoſe a religion in circumſtances of greater diſadvantage, and upon all human accounts, more unlikely to ſuſtain and bear up itſelf than the chriſtian religion was. The firſt appearance of it was ſo mean, and its beginnings ſo ſmall, that no man but would have thought it would preſently have come to nothing; and no other account can be given of the ſtrange ſucceſs and prevalency of it, but that *it was of God*, and therefore *it could not be overthrown.*

II. This diſcourſe may likewiſe ſatisfy us of the reaſon why this miraculous power, which accompanied the Goſpel at firſt, is now ceaſed; becauſe there is not the like reaſon and neceſſity for it, which there was at firſt.

It was highly neceſſary *then*, to introduce the chriſtian religion into the world, and to be a ſenſible evidence to men of the divinity of that new doctrine which was preached to them: But *now* that the Goſpel is generally entertained, there is not the ſame reaſon why this miraculous power ſhould ſtill be continued. *Acquiſito fine, ceſſant media ad finem*, when the end is once obtained, the means ceaſe; and the wiſe God, who is never wanting in what is *neceſſary*, does not uſe to be laviſh in that which is *ſuperfluous*. Now that the chriſtian religion hath got firm footing in the world, God leaves it to be propagated and advanced, by its own rational force, upon the minds of men: Now that the prejudices of education in a contrary religion are removed, and the powers of the world are reconciled to chriſtianity; there is no need of ſuch violent and extraordinary means for the continuance of it, now that it ſtands upon equal advantages with other religions; God hath left it to be carried on, in more human and ordinary ways, and ſuch as are more level and accommodate to the nature of man.

That miracles are long ſince ceaſed, is acknowledged by the fathers, who lived an age or two after the ceaſing of them; particularly by St. *Chryſoſtome*, who gives the ſame reaſon for it, which I have juſt now aſſigned. But the church of *Rome* would ſtill bear us in hand, that this miraculous power does ſtill continue in *their* church, and, according to *Bellarmine*, muſt always continue; becauſe he makes it *an inſeparable property and mark of the true church.*

But *we* pretend to no ſuch power, nor have we any reaſon ſo to do; becauſe all the doctrines of *our* religion, are the ancient doctrines of chriſtianity, deliver'd by our Saviour, and by his Apoſtles publiſhed to the world; and theſe are ſufficiently confirm'd already, by the miracles which our Saviour and his Apoſtles wrought in the primitive times of chriſtianity. But the church of *Rome* hath great occaſion and need of *new* miracles, to confirm their *new* doctrines; and therefore as they have reaſon, they uſually apply them to the confirmation of their *new* doctrines; ſome to confirm *purgatory*, and to give countenance to *indulgences*; others to encourage *the worſhip of the bleſſed Virgin, and the ſaints*; others to confirm that which all the miracles in the world are not ſufficient to confirm, I mean the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*; which, becauſe it overthrows the certainty of *ſenſe*, is in the nature of it peculiarly incapable of being confirmed by a *miracle*.

III. And *laſtly*, The conſideration of what has been ſaid, does juſtly upbraid us, that this religion, which was ſo powerful at firſt, and hath ſuch characters of divinity upon it, coming down to us confirmed by ſo many miracles, ſhould yet have ſo little effect upon moſt of us who call ourſelves Chriſtians.

We have all the advantages of the chriſtian religion, having been educated and brought up in it; and yet it hath leſs effect upon *us*, than it had upon *thoſe* whoſe minds were prejudiced, and whoſe manners were depraved, by the principles of a falſe religion: For *thoſe* who were reduced from paganiſm to chriſtianity, did on the ſudden become better men, and were more holy and virtuous in their lives, than the greateſt part of *us*, who have been inſtructed and trained up all our lives in the doctrine of chriſtianity.

The true reaſon of which is, that many of *us* are *Chriſtians* upon the ſame account that *they* were at firſt *heathens*; *becauſe it was the religion of their country, and* *they were born and bred up in it.* But chriſtianity was *the religion of their choice*, and there were no motives to perſuade them to the *profeſſion of that* religion, but what were as powerful to oblige them to the *practice* of it. Let *us* alſo be Chriſtians, not only by *cuſtom*, but by *choice*; and then we ſhall live according to our religion.

He that takes up a religion for any other reaſon than to obey and practiſe it does not *chooſe* a religion, but only counterfeits the choice of it. We have, beyond compariſon, the beſt and moſt reaſonable religion in the world; a religion that hath the greateſt evidence of its truth, that contains the beſt precepts, and gives men the greateſt aſſurance of a future happineſs, and directs them to the ſureſt way of attaining it. Now the better our religion is, the worſe are *we*, if we be not made good by it. The philoſophy of the heathen made ſome virtuous: and there were many eminent ſaints under the imperfection of the *Jewiſh* inſtitution. What degrees then of holineſs and virtue may be expected from us, upon whom the glorious light of the Goſpel ſhineth ſo brightly!

I will conclude all, with the words of the Apoſtle, *Heb.* ii. 1, 2, 3, 4. *Therefore we ought to give the more earneſt heed to the things which we have heard, leſt at any time we ſhould let them ſlip. For if the word ſpoken by Angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward: How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation, which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him: God alſo bearing them witneſs, both with ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own will?*

SERMON XXI.

Preach'd on the Feaſt of St. Michael.

The Nature, Office and Employment of Good Angels.

HEB. i. 14.

Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?

THIS is ſpoken of good Angels, whoſe *exiſtence*, as well as that of evil ſpirits, the ſcriptures both of the Old and New Teſtament do every where take for granted, no leſs than they do *the being of God*, and *the immortality of the ſoul.* And well they may, ſince they are all founded upon the general conſent of all ages, derived down to us from the firſt ſpring and original of mankind; of which general conſent and tradition, it is one of the hardeſt things in the world to aſſign any good reaſon, if the things themſelves were not true. Therefore I ſhall not go about to force my way into this argument concerning *the exiſtence of ſpirits, and beings diſtinct from matter*, by dint of diſpute, (which perhaps would neither be ſo proper, nor ſo profitable for this aſſembly) but ſhall take the thing as I find it received by a general conſent of mankind. And ſo the books of divine revelation do; nor was there reaſon to proceed in any other method, than to ſuppoſe theſe things, and take them for granted, as generally aſſented to by mankind, without either aſſerting them for new diſcoveries, or attempting to prove what was ſo univerſally believed. The ſcriptures indeed have more particularly declared *the nature* of theſe ſpirits, as alſo their *order* and *employment*; as in the words which I have read to you, where *the office* and *employment* of good Angels is more particularly diſcovered; *Are they not all* (ſays the text) *miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?*

The author of this epiſtle to the *Hebrews* having had occaſion, in comparing the *two diſpenſations* of the *Law* and the *Goſpel*, to ſpeak of the *Angels*, by whoſe miniſtry the law was given, did not think fit to entertain thoſe to whom he wrote, with any nice and curious ſpeculations (for ſchool divinity was not then in faſhion) about the *nature* and *order* of Angels; but tells us, what it concerns us more to know, namely, what their *office* and *employment* is in regard to us. Concerning their *nature*, he only tells us, that they are *ſpirits*; as to their *office* and *employment*, he ſays in general, that they are *miniſtring ſpirits*, that is, that they ſtand before God to attend upon him, ready to receive his commands, and to execute his pleaſure; more particularly, that they are upon occaſion appointed and ſent forth by God to *miniſter* on the behalf, and to do good offices *for them that ſhall be heirs of ſalvation*. Which laſt words are a deſcription of pious and good men, ſuch as had ſincerely embraced the chriſtian religion, and were thereby become the children of God, and *heirs of* eternal *ſalvation*. So that theſe words are a brief ſummary of *the doctrine* of *good Angels*, and of what the ſcripture has thought fit to reveal to us concerning them: Which may be referred to theſe *three* heads.

Firſt, Their nature; *Are they not ſpirits?*

Secondly, Their general office and employment; *Are they not miniſtring ſpirits?*

Thirdly, Their ſpecial office and employment, in regard to good men; *they are ſent forth to miniſter for them* (that is, in their behalf, and for their benefit) *who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation*.

And this is as much as is neceſſary for us to know concerning them; and all this is very agreeable to the general apprehenſion of mankind; but the ſcripture hath very much cleared and confirmed to us, that which was more obſcure and leſs certain before. I ſhall briefly explain and illuſtrate theſe *three* heads, and then draw ſome uſeful inferences from the whole.

Firſt, For their *nature*, they are *ſpirits*. This is univerſally agreed by all that acknowledge ſuch an order of beings, that they *are ſpirits*: But whether they are pure ſpirits, diveſted of matter, and all kind of corporeal *vehicle* (as the philoſophers term it) hath been a great controverſy, but I think of no great moment and conſequence. Not only the ancient philoſophers, but ſome of the ancient chriſtian fathers, did believe Angels to be clothed with ſome kind of bodies, conſiſting of the pureſt and fineſt matter; which they call *Æthereal*. And this opinion ſeems to be grounded upon a pious belief, that it is the peculiar excellency and prerogative of the divine nature, to be a pure and ſimple ſpirit, wholly ſeparate from matter: But the more current opinion of the chriſtian church (eſpecially of latter times) hath been, that Angels are mere and pure ſpirits, without any thing that is material and corporeal belonging to them; but yet ſo, that they have power to aſſume thin and airy bodies, and can when they pleaſe appear in human ſhape, as they are frequently in ſcripture ſaid to have done. And this ſeems moſt agreeable to the ſcripture account of them; though I think it is no *neceſſary article of faith*, either to believe that they are clothed with ſome kind of bodies, or that they are wholly diveſted of matter.

But however this be, they are deſcribed in ſcripture to be endowed with great excellencies and perfections; they are ſaid *to excel in ſtrength*, *Pſal.* ciii. 20. and in *knowledge* and *wiſdom*. Hence are thoſe expreſſions of *being as an Angel of God, to diſcern good and bad*, 2 Sam. xiv. 17. *Wiſe, according to the wiſdom of an Angel*, ver. 20. To be of great *activity* and *ſwiftneſs* in their motions; hence it is that they are repreſented in ſcripture, as *full of wings*: And to excel in *purity* and *holineſs*; hence is that title given them in ſcripture, of *the holy Angels*. This is the ſum of what the ſcripture hath in ſeveral places delivered to us, concerning the *nature* and *properties* of *good Angels*; and beyond this, all our knowledge of them is mere conjecture and uncertainty; and the nice ſpeculations concerning them, idle and wanton curioſities. Indeed the ſcripture gives ſufficient intimation of ſeveral *ranks* and *orders* among them, by calling *Michael* an *Archangel*, and *chief prince*, and by diſtinguiſhing them by the names of *principalities, and powers, and thrones, and dominions*: But what the difference of theſe names imports, though ſome have attempted to explain, yet I do not find that they have diſcovered any thing to us, beſides their own ignorance and arrogance, in pretending to be *wiſe above what is written*; *intruding into thoſe things which they have not ſeen, being vainly puffed up in their fleſhly minds*; as the Apoſtle cenſures ſome in his time.

Secondly, We have here their *general office and employment*; *they are miniſtring ſpirits*; they are (as I may ſay) domeſtick ſervants, and conſtant attendants upon that great and glorious King *whoſe throne is in the heavens, and whoſe kingdom ruleth over all; they ſtand continually before him, to behold his face,* expecting his commands, and in a conſtant readineſs to do his will. For though the omnipotence of God, and his perfect power of acting be ſuch, that he can do all things immediately by himſelf, *whatever he pleaſeth in heaven and in earth*; can govern the world, and ſteer the affairs of it, and turn them which way he thinks beſt, by the leaſt nod and beck of his will, without any inſtruments or miniſters of his pleaſure; yet his wiſdom and goodneſs has thought fit to honour his creatures, eſpecially this higher and more perfect rank of beings, with his commands; and to make them according to their ſeveral degrees and capacities the ordinary miniſters of his affairs, in the rule and government of this inferior world; and this not for his own eaſe (for to infinite power nothing can be difficult or troubleſome) but for their happineſs; and he therefore employs them in his work and ſervice, that they may be capable of his favour and rewards.

And that the Angels of God are the great miniſters of his providence here in the world, hath not only been the conſtant tradition of all ages; but is very frequently and plainly aſſerted in ſcripture. In the Old Teſtament we often read that God employed his Angels to be the meſſengers of his will and pleaſure to men; and to carry good tidings and comfortable news to them upon ſeveral occaſions: As to *Abraham*, to foretel the miraculous birth of his ſon *Iſaac*; and afterwards to reſcue him from being ſacrificed: To *Jacob*, when he was ſo afraid of his brother *Eſau*: To *Manoah* and his wife, to fortel the birth of *Samſon*, the great deliverer of *Iſrael* from the *Philiſtines*: And upon that great occaſion of bringing the people of *Iſrael* out of *Egypt*, and conducting them through the wilderneſs, he ſent a great and mighty Angel (called *the Angel of his preſence*) to go before them, and guide them in their way: And the Apoſtle tells us, that *the Law was delivered to them upon mount Sinai by the diſpoſition of Angels.*

On the other hand, God frequently made them the meſſengers of his wrath, and inſtruments of his vengeance. Thus he ſent them to foretel, and to execute that terrible deſtruction upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*. And he ſent a deſtroying Angel to brandiſh his ſword in a viſible manner over *Jeruſalem*, and to ſmite them with the peſtilence, for *David*'s ſin in numbering the people. And by the miniſtry of an Angel he ſlew in the camp of the *Aſſyrians* in one night, an hundred and eighty five thouſand. And, *Acts* xii. 23. it is ſaid, that *the Angel of the Lord ſmote Herod*, for receiving the blaſphemous acclamations of the people.

Nay, the Angels ſhall be the inſtruments and executioners of God's vengeance upon the wicked at the judgment of the great day. So the judge himſelf tells us, *Matth.* xiii. 49, 50. *So ſhall it be at the end of the world; the Angels ſhall come forth and ſever the wicked from among the juſt, and ſhall caſt them into the furnace of fire, there ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of teeth.*

And that particular Angels do preſide over empires and kingdoms, and ſway the weighty affairs of them; and by a ſecret and inviſible hand manage and bring about great changes and revolutions, both *Jews* and Chriſtians have collected with great probability and conſent from *Daniel* x. where there is mention made of *the prince of the kingdom of Perſia withſtanding the Angel that was ſent to Daniel*, and of *Michael a chief prince aſſiſting him.* And of this miniſtry of Angels, in the government of kingdoms, *Clemens Alexandrinus* ſpeaks, as of a thing out of all controverſy. I proceed to the

Third thing which I principally intended, and ſeems to be chiefly deſigned in the text; and this is *the ſpecial office and employment* of good Angels, in regard to good men; and for this the Apoſtle expreſly tells us, that *they are ſent forth to miniſter for them* (that is, in their behalf, and for their benefit) *who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation.* In which words there are *three* things very conſiderable for our inſtruction and comfort.

1. Their particular *deſignation* and *appointment* for this employment, expreſſed in theſe words, *ſent forth*, ἀποϛελλόμενοι, as if they were particularly commiſſioned and appointed by God for this very end. God himſelf doth ſuperintend all affairs, and by his particular deſignation and command, the Angels do *fulfil his word*, and execute the pleaſure of his good-will, towards us. Hence it is ſo frequently ſaid in ſcripture that *God ſent his Angel to* ſuch or ſuch a perſon for ſuch and ſuch purpoſes.

2. You have here the *general end* of their employment; *for good men*; they are ſent forth on our behalf, and for our benefit; to take care of us and protect us, to ſuccour and comfort, to direct and aſſiſt, to reſcue and deliver us.

3. Here is the *more ſpecial end* of their employment, in regard to good men, intended in thoſe words; *for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation*; hereby ſignifying, that the Angels are employed about good men, with regard more particularly to their eternal happineſs, and for the conducting and furthering of the great affair of their everlaſting ſalvation. This certainly is our greateſt concernment; and therefore they have a more particular charge and care of us in regard to this.

It was a common opinion among the *heathen*, and a conſtant and firmly believed tradition among the *Jews* (the *Sadducees* only excepted, who did not believe there were Angels or ſpirits) that every man (at leaſt every good man) had a *guardian Angel* appointed him by God, to take a ſpecial care of him and his concernments both ſpiritual and temporal; to guard him from dangers, to direct and proſper him in his way, and to comfort and deliver him in his affliction and diſtreſs. And therefore we find among the *Jewiſh* prayers, uſed by them at this day, a particular prayer, wherein they requeſt of God, *to command the Angels who have the care of human affairs, to help and aſſiſt, to preſerve and deliver them.* But eſpecially they believed good Angels in their attendance upon good men, to be very active and diligent to incline them to good, and to encourage them therein, by holy emotions and ſuggeſtions, by ſecret comfort and aſſiſtances, and by oppoſing evil ſpirits, and defending us againſt their aſſaults and by countermining their malicious deſigns and attempts upon us. And accordingly we find that the beſt men among the *Jews* did ſtedfaſtly believe, if not *the particular guardianſhip* of Angels, and that every good man had his *particular Angel* aſſigned to him by God, to take the particular charge of him; yet the *common miniſtry* of good Angels, about good men; and their more *eſpecial* care of *particular perſons*, upon *particular and great occaſions*, to protect them from temporal evils, and to promote and proſper their temporal affairs and concernments.

Of this, *Abraham*, *the father of the faithful*, and *the friend of God*, was moſt firmly perſuaded (at leaſt in matters of great moment and concernment to us) as appears by his diſcourſe with his ſteward, when he he was ſending him to treat of a match for his ſon, *Gen.* xxiv. 40. *The Lord* (ſays he) *before whom I walk, will ſend his Angel with thee, and proſper thy way.* And *David* the *man after God's own heart*, does more than once declare his confident belief of the watchful care and miniſtry of Angels about good men, *Pſal.* xxxiv. 7. *The Angel of the Lord incampeth about them that fear him and delivereth them.* And, *Pſal.* xci. 11, 12. ſpeaking of the good man, who putteth his truſt and confidence in God, he tells him for his comfort and ſecurity, that the holy Angels have a particular charge of him to preſerve him from all the miſchiefs and dangers to which he is expoſed; *he ſhall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; they ſhall bear thee up in their hands, leſt thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone.*

So that according to the perſuaſion of thoſe two excellent perſons, and of greateſt renown for piety in all the Old Teſtament, very much of the ſafety and the ſucceſs of good men, even in their temporal concernments, is to be aſcribed to the vigilant care and protection of good Angels. And though this be ſeldom viſible and ſenſible to us, yet we have great reaſon, upon ſo great teſtimonies, to aſſent to the truth of it. And there is no reaſon I think to doubt, but that God's care extends *now* to *Chriſtians*, as well as it did to the *Jews*; and that the Angels have as much kindneſs for *us*, as they had for the *Jews*; and there is no reaſon to think, that the Angels are *now* either dead or idle.

Our Saviour tells us, that they cannot die; and our reaſon tells us, that a pure ſpirit is an active principle; and the ſcripture repreſents Angels as all *flame* and *wings*. Evil ſpirits are believed by *Chriſtians* to be as active *now* to all purpoſes of harm and miſchief, as ever: And why ſhould any man imagine, that good ſpirits are not as intent and buſy to do good? The Apoſtle (I am ſure) tells us in *the text*, that the Angels in common (all of them) do employ their ſervice about us, and wait to do good offices to us; *are they not all* (ſays he) *miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them that ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?*

And our Saviour, *Matth.* xviii. 10. ſeems to approve and confirm the tradition of the *Jews*, concerning *particular guardian Angels* belonging to every one that believed in him; that is, to every Chriſtian; *take heed* (ſays he) *that ye deſpiſe not one of theſe little ones, for I ſay unto you, that in heaven, their Angels always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* And this ſeems likewiſe to have been a received opinion among the firſt *Chriſtians*; for we find, *Acts* xii. 15. that when *Peter* was miraculouſly releaſed out of priſon by an Angel, and came to the houſe where the *Chriſtians* were aſſembled to pray for him, and one told them, *that Peter was at the door, they ſaid it was his Angel*; thinking that he himſelf was faſt in priſon: For which ſaying there could be no reaſon, had there not been a current opinion among them of *guardian Angels.*

And becauſe the providence of God is more peculiarly concerned, in conducting men to eternal happineſs; it is very credible, that God ſhould more eſpecially ordain the miniſtry of Angels about good men, for the furtherance of their ſalvation. And ſo the Apoſtle tells us in the text; *are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them that ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?* Nay, our Saviour, in that remarkable place I mentioned before, *Matth.* xviii. 10. ſeems to intimate, that Angels of *a higher rank and quality*, are aſſign'd *guardians* and *guides* to thoſe that believed on him; *but I ſay unto you, that in heaven their Angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in heaven:* An alluſion to the manner of earthly kings, upon whom not all their ſervants, but *the chief of the nobility* do more immediately attend, and ſtand continually in their preſence; for *to behold the face of the king*, and *to ſtand in his preſence*, are phraſes uſed in ſcripture to ſignify *immediate attendance upon his perſon.* So that by this manner of expreſſion, our Saviour doth moſt ſignificantly intimate, in what eſteem good men are with God, whoſe care and protection he commits to *the chief of the Angels*, to thoſe who are neareſt to him, and in higheſt favour and honour with him; as if he had ſaid, *their Angels* are not of the *ordinary rank*, but ſuch as are admitted to *a more immediate attendance*, upon the great king and governor of the world.

And no doubt it is for no mean end, that ſuch high and glorious ſpirits are employ'd about us; it is chiefly for the furtherance of our ſalvation; for the purchaſing whereof, the ſon of God himſelf (*whom all the Angels of heaven worſhip*) came down from heaven, and appeared and ſuffered in our nature, that we may one day *be made like to the Angels*, and dwell where they are, and may *continually behold the face of our Father which is in heaven, as they do.* And in order to this end, it is very probable, that good Angels are ready to do good offices, juſt contrary to thoſe of evil ſpirits; that is, to employ their beſt diligence and endeavour for the ſalvation of men; and that they are very ſedulous and officious to reſtrain and pull them back from ſin, and to excite and ſolicit them to that which is good; and in a word, to do all they can to help forward the repentance and converſion of ſinners. And this may reaſonably be collected from that paſſage of our Saviour, *Luke* xv. 10. where he tells us, *That there is joy in the preſence of the Angels of God, over one ſinner that repenteth.* And if they be ſo glad of the repentance of a ſinner; we may eaſily imagine how forward they are, to further and promote ſo good a work. And when ſinners are brought to repentance, we have no reaſon to doubt, but that the Angels are as ready to aſſiſt their progreſs in goodneſs.

It hath been a general, and, I think, not ill-grounded opinion, both of the *Jews* and *heathens*, that good Angels are more eſpecially preſent with us, and obſervant of us, and aſſiſtant to us, in the performance of all acts of religion; that they are particularly preſent at our prayers; and therefore the *Jews* ſpeak of a particular Angel for this purpoſe, whom they call *The Angel of prayer*; that they obſerve our vows, and our breach or performance of them. So *Solomon* ſeems to intimate, *Eccl.* v. 4, 6. *When thou voweſt a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleaſure in fools; pay that which thou haſt vowed. Suffer not thy mouth to cauſe thy fleſh to ſin*; that is, do not intangle thy life with a raſh vow, which the frailty of human nature may make thee afterwards to break; *neither ſay thou before the Angel, that it was an error*; that is, do not in the preſence of the Angel who attends upon thee, and obſerves thee, betray thine own error and raſhneſs. This I take to be the meaning of this difficult paſſage, *let not thy mouth cauſe thy fleſh to ſin*; *neither ſay thou before the Angel, that it was an error.*

But the Angels are yet more particularly preſent in the places, and at the times of God's publick worſhip. The placing of *the cherubims* in *the holy of holies*, ſeems to ſignify the preſence of the Angels in our moſt religious addreſſes to God. And *Plutarch* ſays, *that the Angels are the overſeers of divine ſervice.* And therefore we ought to behave ourſelves with all modeſty, reverence and decency in the worſhip of God, out of regard to the Angels who are there preſent, and obſerve our carriage and behaviour.

And to this the Apoſtle plainly hath reſpect in that place, which by interpreters hath been thought ſo difficult, 1 *Cor*. xi. 13. where he ſays, *that for this cauſe*, in the aſſemblies of *Chriſtians* for the worſhip of God, *the woman ought to have a veil upon her head*, in token of ſubjection to her huſband, *becauſe of the Angels*; that is, to be decently and modeſtly attired in the church, becauſe of the preſence of the holy Angels; before whom we ſhould compoſe ourſelves to the greateſt *external gravity* and *reverence*, which the Angels behold and obſerve, but cannot penetrate into the *inward devotion* of our minds, which God only can do; and therefore with regard to him who ſees our hearts, we ſhould more particularly compoſe our minds to the greateſt *ſincerity* and *ſeriouſneſs* in our devotion. Which I would to God, we would all duly conſider, all the while we are exerciſed in the worſhip of God, who chiefly regards our hearts. But we ought likewiſe to be very careful of our *external behaviour*, with a particular regard to the Angels, who are preſent there, to ſee and obſerve *the outward decency and reverence* of our carriage and deportment: Of which we are very careful in the preſence even of an earthly prince, when he either ſpeaks to us, or we make any addreſs to him. And ſurely much more ought we to be ſo, when we are in the immediate preſence of *God*, and of his *holy Angels*, every one of whom is a much greater prince, and of greater power, than any of the princes of this world. But how little is this conſidered (I ſpeak to our ſhame) and by how few among us!

And as Angels are helpful to good men, in working out of their ſalvation throughout the courſe of their lives; ſo at the hour of death they ſtand by them, to comfort them and aſſiſt them in that needful and diſmal time, in that laſt and great conflict of frail mortality with death and the powers of darkneſs; to receive their expiring ſpirits into their charge, and to conduct them ſafely into the manſions of the bleſſed. And to this purpoſe alſo the *Jews* had a tradition, that the Angels wait upon good men at their death, to convey their ſouls into paradiſe: Which is very much countenanced by our Saviour in the parable of *the rich man and Lazarus*, Luke xvi. 22. where it is ſaid, *that when Lazarus died, he was carried by the Angels into Abraham's boſom*.

Nay, that the Angels have ſome charge and care of *the bodies* of good men after death, may not improbably be gathered from that paſſage in St. *Jude*, ver. 9. where *Michael* the *Archangel* is ſaid to have *contended with the devil, about the body of* Moſes. What the ground of this controverſy betwixt them was, may be moſt probably explained, by a paſſage, *Deut*. xxxiv. 6. where it is ſaid, *that God took particular care* (probably by an Angel) *concerning the burying of* Moſes *in a certain valley*; and it is added, *but no man knoweth of his ſepulchre unto this day*. The devil, it ſeems, had a fair proſpect of laying a foundation for idolatry in the worſhip of *Moſes* after his death; if he could have gotten the diſpoſal of his body, to have buried it in ſome known and publick place. And, no doubt it would have gratified him not a little, to have made *him*, who was ſo declared an enemy to idolatry all his life, an occaſion of it after his death. But this God thought fit to prevent, in pity to the people of *Iſrael*, whom he ſaw upon all occaſions ſo prone to idolatry; and for that reaſon committed it to the charge of *Michael* the Archangel, to bury his body ſecretly; and this was the thing which *Michael the Archangel contended with the devil* about.

But before I paſs from this, I cannot but take notice of one memorable circumſtance in this conteſt, mentioned likewiſe by St. *Jude*, in theſe words, *yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the devil, he diſputed about the body of Moſes, durſt not bring againſt him a railing accuſation*. His duty reſtrained him from it, and probably his diſcretion too: As he durſt not offend God, in doing a thing ſo much beneath the dignity and perfection of his nature; ſo he could not but think, that the devil would have been too hard for him at *railing*; a thing to which as the Angels have no diſpoſition, ſo I believe that they have no talent, no faculty at it. The cool conſideration whereof ſhould make all men eſpecially thoſe who call themſelves *divines*, and eſpecially in controverſies about *religion*, aſhamed and afraid of this manner of diſputing; ſince *Michael the Archangel, even when he diſputed with the devil, durſt not bring againſt him a railing accuſation*.

But to proceed. This we are ſure of, that the Angels ſhall be the great miniſters and inſtruments of the reſurrection of our bodies, and the re-union of them to our ſouls. For ſo our bleſſed Saviour has told us, *Matth*. xxiv. 30, 31. That *when the Son of man ſhall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; he ſhall ſend his Angels to gather the elect, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*.

Thus I have as briefly as I could, and ſo far as the ſcripture hath gone before us to give us light in this matter, endeavoured to ſhew the ſeveral ways wherein *good Angels do miniſter in behalf of them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation.* All that now remains, is to draw ſome inferences from this diſcourſe, and ſo I ſhall conclude.

Firſt, What hath been ſaid upon this argument, and ſo abundantly proved from ſcripture, may ſerve to eſtabliſh us in the belief of this truth, and to awaken us to a due conſideration of it. That the Angels are inviſible to us, and that we are ſeldom ſenſible of their preſence, and the good offices they do us, is no ſufficient reaſon againſt the truth and reality of the thing, if by other arguments we are convinced of it. For by the ſame reaſon we may almoſt as well call in queſtion the exiſtence of God, and of our own ſouls; neither of which do fall under the notice of our ſenſes; and yet by other arguments we are ſufficiently convinced of them both. So in this caſe, the general conſent and tradition of mankind, concerning the exiſtence of Angels, and their miniſtry about us, eſpecially being confirmed to us, by clear and expreſs teſtimony of holy ſcripture, ought to be abundant evidence to us, when we conſider that ſo general a conſent muſt have a proportionable cauſe; which can be no other but a general tradition grounded at firſt upon revelation, and derived down to all ſucceeding ages, from the firſt ſpring and original of mankind; and ſince confirmed by manifold revelations of God, both in the Old and New Teſtament.

But yet I am ſenſible, that all this is no conviction to the perverſe and contentious. Men will not believe even the evidence of ſenſe itſelf, when they are ſtrongly prepoſſeſſed and prejudiced to the contrary: For do we not ſee great numbers of men, even ſo many as have the face to call themſelves the *catholick church*, that can make a ſhift, when they have a mind, either to believe or disbelieve things contrary to the plaineſt evidence of their ſenſes? All that I ſhall ſay farther about this matter, is, that this doctrine of *Angels* is not a peculiar doctrine either of the *Jewiſh* or *Chriſtian religion*, but the general doctrine of all *religions* that ever were; and therefore cannot be objected againſt by any but the atheiſts.

And yet after all, I know not whence it comes to paſs, that this great truth, which is ſo comfortable to mankind, is ſo very little conſidered by us. Perhaps the corruption of ſo great a part of the chriſtian church, in the point of *the worſhip of Angels*, may have run us ſo far into the other extreme, as ſcarcely to acknowledge any benefit we receive by them. But ſurely we may believe they do us good, without any obligation to pray to them; and may own them as the miniſters of God's providence, without making them the objects of our worſhip.

I confeſs it ſeems to me a very odd thing, that the power of the devil, and his influence upon men, and the particular vigilancy and activity of evil ſpirits to tempt us to ſin, ſhould be ſo readily owned, and ſo ſenſibly talked of among chriſtians; and yet the aſſiſtance of good Angels ſhould be ſo little taken notice of and conſidered by us. The ſcripture ſpeaks plainly of both, and the reaſons for believing both are equal: For God forbid but that good Angels ſhould be as officious and forward to do us good, as the devil and his angels are malicious and buſy to do us miſchief. And indeed, it would be very hard with mankind, if we had not as much reaſon to hope for the aſſiſtance and protection of good ſpirits, as we have cauſe to fear the malice and fury of the bad. Good Angels are certainly as powerful, and have as ſtrong a propenſion and inclination to do good, as the devil has to do harm; and the number of good Angels is probably much greater than of evil ſpirits. The biggeſt numbers that are uſed in ſcripture, are applied to good Angels, *Dan.* vii. 10. it is ſaid of *the Angels about God's throne*, that *thouſand thouſands miniſtred unto him, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand ſtood before him.* And *Revelation* v. 11. *the number of them* is ſaid to be *ten thouſand times ten thouſand, and thouſand of thouſands.* And the Apoſtle to the *Hebrew*, Chap. xii. 22. calls them *an innumerable company of Angels.*

What then ſhould be the reaſon, that men ſhould be ſo apt to own the ſnares and temptations, which the devil lays before us, in all our ways; but take ſo little notice of the attendance and good offices done to us by good ſpirits? I can imagine but theſe *two* reaſons, and I am ſorry I can find no better; that we are more mindful of injuries than of benefits; and are glad to take in others for the excuſe of our faults, but are loth any ſhould come in for a ſhare in the good that is done by us. And yet methinks it ſhould be a very comfortable conſideration to us, againſt the enmity and cunning of the devil, and his angels; that the holy angels of God are as intent and induſtrious to do us good, and to help forward our ſalvation, as evil ſpirits can be to work our ruin and deſtroy us.

Secondly, we ſhould with great thankfulneſs acknowledge the great goodneſs of God to us, who takes ſuch care of us, as to appoint his Angels, and to give them particular commiſſion and charge concerning us, to protect and aſſiſt us in all our ways, and eſpecially to promote the great concernment of our eternal happineſs: and that not only ſome particular and inferior ſpirits, but the chief miniſters of this great King of the world, thoſe that *ſtand in his preſence, and behold his Face*; and not a few of theſe, but the whole order of them are employed about us. So the Apoſtle ſeems to ſay, by the queſtion which he puts in the text, *Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter?* That is, all, at one time or other. And though they be principally appointed to miniſter to us, in order to our ſalvation; yet we have no reaſon to doubt but God employs them many times for our temporal ſafety, and makes uſe of them more eſpecially in thoſe *great revolutions*, in which his *cauſe* and *religion* are more immediately concern'd.

In ſuch a caſe, it is not at all incredible, that God ſhould *give his Angels a particular charge* concerning thoſe that *fight his battles*; *to pitch about their camps*, and ſecretly to aſſiſt them againſt their enemies, and to ward off and put by many dangerous blows and thruſts, which are made at them; and wonderfully to preſerve them, when the inſtruments of death fly about them, and do execution on every ſide of them. To what can we aſcribe *ſuch* and *ſo many* remarkable deliverances of *a perſon upon whom ſo much depends*; but either to the immediate hand of God or to the miniſtry of Angels? And where God is provided ſo abundantly, with ſuch powerful beings and miniſters of his will; though they may be inviſible to us, yet there is great reaſon to believe, that he very ſeldom works without them.

And now what an aſtoniſhing regard is this, which the great God is pleaſed to have for the ſons of men, that he ſhould make the whole creation ſerviceable to us; not only the viſible creation, for the ſupport of our bodies, and the diverſion of our minds; but even the nobleſt of all his creatures, the great and glorious inhabitants of the inviſible world, mightily ſurpaſſing us mortal men, in the ſimplicity and purity of their nature, in the quickneſs and largeneſs of their underſtandings, and in their power and vigour of acting: I ſay, that God ſhould give theſe excellent and glorious beings the charge over us, and ſend them forth to miniſter to us, for the ſafeguard of our perſons, for the ſucceſs of our affairs, and for the ſecurity and furtherance of our eternal ſalvation! *Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him*, that when *thou madeſt him lower than the Angels*, thou ſhouldeſt yet *make the Angels to miniſter unto him!*

Thirdly, If the Angels have the particular charge of good men, we ſhould take heed how we deſpiſe, or be any way injurious to them: For how deſpicable ſoever they may appear to us, they are certainly very dear to God; ſince he deems them ſo conſiderable, as to employ his chief miniſters about them, and to commit the charge of them to thoſe, who by their office, do more immediately attend upon himſelf. This is our Saviour's own argument, *Matth.* xviii. *Take heed that ye deſpiſe not one of theſe little ones*; *for I ſay unto you, their Angels do continually behold the face of your Father which is in heaven.* With how much contempt ſoever we may look upon *a poor man*, he hath friends and patrons of a higher ſort, than any of the princes of this world.

Fourthly, If God appointed Angels to be *miniſtring ſpirits on our behalf*; we may thence very reaſonably conclude, that God did not intend that we ſhould *worſhip* them. This ſeems to be a clear conſequence, if the reaſoning of the Angel in the *Revelation* be good; where he forbids St. *John to worſhip him*; *becauſe he was his fellow-ſervant*. Yea, the conſequence ſeems to be yet ſtronger from the text; that if they be not only *fellow-ſervants*, but do in ſome ſort *miniſter unto us*, then we are not to *worſhip* them.

And yet this practice is openly avowed in the church of *Rome*; though it be reproved ſo very ſeverely by the Apoſtle, as an apoſtaſy from chriſtianity, *Coloſſ.* ii. 18, 19. *Let no man* (ſays he) *deceive you, in a voluntary humility, and worſhipping of Angels*; *not holding the head*; as if it were a renouncing of Chriſt, out of a pretended humility, to make uſe of other mediators beſides him to the Father. And notwithſtandiug alſo that the Angel in the *Revelation* does ſo vehemently forbid it, *ὅρα μὴ*, *by no means, upon no terms do it*; and he forbids it for ſuch a reaſon as makes it for ever unlawful; namely, that we ought not to worſhip thoſe who ſerve and worſhip God together with us; *Do it not*, ſays the Angel, *I am thy fellow-ſervant*, *worſhip thou God*. In which words, he plainly directs us to the ſole and proper object of our worſhip.

Bellarmine, the great champion of the popiſh cauſe, never uſed more groſs and apparent ſhuffling, than in anſwer to this text. He ſays *firſt*, *Why are we reproved for doing what St.* John *did?* To which the anſwer is very eaſy; becauſe St. *John* himſelf was reproved by an Angel for doing what he did. And now that his queſtion is anſwered, one might, methinks, ask him a croſs queſtion or two. Why does the church of *Rome* preſume to do that, which an Angel does ſo expreſly forbid to be done? Or was it fit for St. *John* to worſhip one, who (according to *Bellarmine*) was ſo ignorant in the doctrine of the catholick church, as to reprove him for doing his duty? as is evident from his *ſecond* crafty anſwer to this text, *That St.* John *did well to give due worſhip to the Angel:* And yet it is plain from this text, that the Angel did not think the worſhip which St. *John* gave him, to be his due.

It is very hard to imagine, but that a man of *Bellarmine*'s underſtanding did intend to give up the cauſe, in his anſwers to this text: But if he was in earneſt, then the matter is brought to this plain and ſhort iſſue; *Whether it be fitter for us to believe a Cardinal of* Rome, *or an Angel of God?*

Laſtly, We ſhould imitate the holy Angels, by endeavouring to ſerve God as they do, in miniſtring to the good of others. Whilſt we are in the body, in this ſtate of infirmity and imperfection; though we cannot ſerve God with the ſame activity and vigour that the bleſſed Angels do, yet we may in the ſame ſincerity, and with the ſame true pleaſure and delight.

And we ſhould learn alſo of them, to condeſcend to the meaneſt ſervices, for the good of others. If the Angels, who are no ways allied to us, and do ſo much excel us, in the dignity and perfection of their nature (for though *David* ſays, that *God made man a little lower than the Angels*; his meaning is, that he made him next below the Angels in the rank of beings; but yet very diſtant from them in perfection) I ſay, if thoſe glorious creatures, who are *the chief of the ways* and works *of God*, do not think much to humble themſelves to be miniſters on our behalf; ſhall we be ſo proud as to think much to ſtoop to the loweſt offices, to ſerve one another?

You ſee, my brethren, what is the conſtant work and employment of the bleſſed ſpirits above; to do good to men, eſpecially in order to their eternal happineſs; and this is the higheſt degree of charity, and charity is the higheſt perfection of men and Angels: So that to employ ourſelves, with all our minds, and with all our might, to help forward the ſalvation of others, is to be *good Angels* (I had almoſt ſaid to be *a kind of Gods*) to men.

I hope that we all of us do hope one day to be *like the Angels*, in the purity and perfection of their nature. So our Saviour has told us, that *at the reſurrection we ſhall be like the Angels:* Now as they are the patterns of our hope and happineſs; ſo let us make them the examples of our duty and obedience; according as our Saviour hath taught us to pray, *that God's will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven*; that is, that we may ſerve God, and do his will here on earth (ſo far as the infirmity of our nature and of our preſent ſtate will admit) with the ſame readineſs and diligence, with the ſame chearfulneſs and zeal, that the holy and bleſſed Angels do in heaven. And let us aſpire continually in our minds, after that bleſſed time, when we ſhall be free from ſin and ſorrow, from affliction and pain, from diſeaſes and death; when we ſhall ſerve God without diſtraction, and do his will without wearineſs, and ſhall *be for ever with the Lord, amidſt an innumerable company of Angels, and the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect.*

Finally, Let us bleſs God, as for all the viſible effects of his merciful providence towards us, ſo likewiſe for the inviſible aids and protection of his holy Angels; many times probably vouchſafed to us, when we are but little aware of it. But above all, let us bleſs him for his Son, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who *was made a little lower than the Angels*, that is, a mortal man; *that by the ſuffering of death* for our ſakes, *he might be clothed with glory and honour, according to the working of that mighty power which God wrought in Chriſt when he raiſed him from the dead, and ſet him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and powers, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but alſo in that which is to come. To him, O Father, with thee and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and for ever.* Amen.

Preach'd on Saint Luke's Day.

SERMON XXII.

The Reputation of Good Men after Death.

PSAL. cxii. 6.

The latter part of the Verſe.

The Righteous ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance.

AS the deſire and hope of immortality, which is implanted in human nature, is ſome evidence of the thing; ſo likewiſe that natural deſire which is in men, to have a good name perpetuated, and to be remembered, and mentioned with honour, when they are dead and gone, is a ſign, that there is in human nature ſome preſage of a life after death; in which they hope, among other rewards of well-doing, to meet with this alſo, to be well ſpoken of to poſterity: And though probably we ſhould not know the good that is ſaid of us, when we are dead, yet it is an encouragement to virtue, to be ſecured of it before-hand; and to find by experience, that they who have done their part well in this life, go off with applauſe; and that the memory of their good actions is preſerved and tranſmitted to poſterity.

And among the many advantages of piety and virtue, this is not altogether inconſiderable, that it reflects an honour upon our memory after death; which is a thing much more valuable than to have our bodies preſerved from putrefaction: For *that* I think is the meaning of *Solomon*, when he prefers a good name before precious ointment, *Eccl.* vii. 1. *A good name is better than precious ointment.* *This* they uſed in embalming of dead bodies, to preſerve them from noiſomneſs and corruption: But *a good name* preſerves a man's memory, and makes it grateful to poſterity; which is a far greater benefit, than that of *a precious ointment*, which ſerves only to keep a dead body from ſtench and rottenneſs.

I ſhall briefly explain the words, and then conſider the matter contained in them; *the righteous ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance.* By the *righteous* is probably here meant *the good man* in general; for though juſtice and righteouſneſs, are in ſcripture frequently uſed for that particular virtue, whereby a man is diſpoſed to render to every man his own; which is known by the name of *juſtice*; yet it is leſs frequently, and perhaps in this place, uſed in a larger ſenſe, ſo as to comprehend all *piety* and *virtue.* For ſo *the righteous man* is deſcribed at the beginning of this *Pſalm*, *Bleſſed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments:* And he is oppoſed to *the wicked man*, ver. 10. *the wicked ſhall ſee it and be grieved*; that is, he ſhall be troubled to ſee the proſperity of the *righteous*; the manifold bleſſings of his life, and the good name he ſhall leave behind him at his death; which is the meaning of *his being in everlaſting remembrance*; that is, long after he is dead, perhaps for many Ages, he ſhall be well ſpoken of, and his name mentioned with honour, and his good deeds recorded and remembred to all poſterity.

So that the ſenſe of the words amounts to this, *That eminently good men, do commonly leave a good name behind them, and tranſmit a grateful memory of themſelves to after-ages.* I ſay *commonly*, for ſo we are to underſtand this kind of ſayings; not that they are ſtrictly, and univerſally true, without exception; but uſually, and for the moſt part. It is poſſible, that a good man may ſoon be forgotten, by the malice of men; or through the partiality and iniquity of the age, may have his name blemiſhed after death, and be miſ-repreſented to poſterity: But *for the moſt part* it is otherwiſe; and though the world be very wicked, yet it ſeldom deals ſo hardly and unjuſtly with men of eminent goodneſs and virtue, as to defraud them of their due praiſe and commendation after death. It very frequently happens otherwiſe to good men, whilſt they are alive; nay, they are then very ſeldom ſo juſtly treated, as to be generally eſteemed and well ſpoken of, and to be allowed their due praiſe and reputation: But after death, their good name is generally ſecured and vindicated, and poſterity does them that right, which perhaps the age wherein they lived denied to them. Therefore in the proſecution of this argument, I ſhall enquire into theſe *two* things.

Firſt, Whence it comes to paſs, that good men are very often defrauded of their juſt praiſe and reputation, whilſt they are alive: And,

Secondly, What Security they have of a good name after death.

Firſt, Whence it comes to paſs, that good men are ſo frequently defrauded of their juſt praiſe and reputation, while they are alive. And to give ourſelves full ſatisfaction in this matter, *two* things are fit to be enquired into.

1. From what cauſe this proceeds.

2. For what reaſon the providence of God doth often permit it.

(1.) From what cauſe it proceeds, that good men have ſo often the hard fate to be ill ſpoken of, and to be ſeverely cenſured, and to have their worth much detracted from, while they are alive.

And this proceeds partly from good men themſelves; and partly from others.

1. Good men themſelves are many times the cauſe of it. For the beſt men are imperfect; and preſent and viſible imperfections do very much leſſen and abate the reputation of a man's goodneſs. It cannot be otherwiſe, but that the luſtre of a great piety and virtue ſhould be ſomewhat obſcured, by that mixture of human frailty which does neceſſarily attend this ſtate of imperfection: And though a man by great care and conſideration, by great vigilancy and pains with himſelf, be arrived to that degree and pitch of goodneſs, as to have but a very few viſible failings, and thoſe ſmall, in compariſon; yet when theſe come to be ſcanned and commented upon, by envy or ill-will, they will be ſtrangely inflamed and magnified, and made much greater, and more than in truth they are. But there are few perſons in the world, of that excellent goodneſs, but beſides the common and more pardonable frailties of humanity, they do now and then diſcover ſomething, which might perhaps juſtly deſerve a ſevere cenſure, if ſome amends were not made for it, by many and great virtues.

Very good men are ſubject to conſiderable imprudences, and ſudden paſſions; and eſpecially to an affected ſeverity and moroſeneſs of carriage; which is very diſguſtful, and apt to beget diſlike. And they are the more incident to theſe kind of imperfections; becauſe out of a juſt hatred of the vicious cuſtoms and practices of the world, and to keep out of the way of temptation, they think it ſafeſt to retire from the world as much as they can; being loth to venture themſelves, more than needs, in ſo infectious an air. By this means, their ſpirits are apt to be a little ſour, and they muſt neceſſarily be ignorant of many points of civility, and good-humour, which are great *ornaments* of virtue, though not of the *eſſence* of it.

Now two or three faults in a good man, if an uncharitable man have but the handling and managing them, may eaſily caſt a conſiderable blemiſh upon his reputation; becauſe the better the man is, ſo much the more conſpicuous are his faults; as ſpots are ſooneſt diſcovered, and moſt taken notice of, in a pure and white garment. Beſides that, in matters of cenſure, mankind do much incline to the harder ſide; and but very few perſons are ſo charitable and equal, as to conſtrue things to the beſt ſenſe, and to conſider a man altogether; and fairly to ſet the good that is in him, againſt his faults and imperfections. But,

2. Though good men many times contribute too much, to the leſſening of their own reputation, with thoſe among whom they live; yet the principal cauſe of their ſuffering in this kind, is not from themſelves, but others; and that upon theſe *three* accounts:

1. From the hatred and oppoſition of bad men to holineſs and virtue; and theſe are commonly the greateſt number, and make the loudeſt cry. They are declared enemies to *goodneſs*; and then how can it be expected, they ſhould have any great kindneſs for *good men?* They want virtue themſelves; and therefore they think themſelves upbraided by the good qualities of others.

This enmity of wicked men againſt the righteous, and the true reaſon of it, is very well expreſſed in the *Wiſdom of Solomon*, chap. ii. ver. 12. *Let us* (ſay they) *lie in wait for the righteous; becauſe he is not for our turn, and is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and he objecteth to our infamy, the ſins of our youth; he was made to reprove our thoughts, therefore he is grievous unto us, even to behold; for his life is not like other men, he is quite of another faſhion; we are eſteemed of him as reprobate ſilver, he abſtaineth from our ways,* *as from filthineſs*. This is that which filleth the minds of wicked men with malice againſt the righteous; and malice will eaſily invent ways to blaſt any man's reputation. Good men do ſometimes, as it is their duty, reprove thoſe that are bad; or if they do it not in word, yet they upbraid them in their actions, and contrary courſe of life; and both theſe are grievous and provoking to them. Not but that wicked men are many times in their conſciences convinced of the real goodneſs of thoſe whom they ſpeak againſt; but they will not own it, leſt in ſo doing they ſhould condemn themſelves.

2. Another cauſe of this, is the envy of thoſe, who perhaps have ſome degree of goodneſs themſelves. For great virtue is apt to raiſe envy in thoſe who fall ſhort of it; and this makes thoſe who are but imperfectly good, to detract from the eminent worth of others; becauſe they are ſenſible they are outſhined by them, and that it occaſions a diſadvantageous compariſon, and makes their defects taken notice of.

They can endure a man that is moderately good, and keeps pace with his neighbours: But if he endeavour to outſtrip them, they preſently combine againſt him, and take all opportunities to undermine his reputation; and will be very glad, either to find a blot in his eſcutcheon, or *to fix* one there.

3. There is ſomething in the very preſence and nearneſs of goodneſs and virtue, which is apt to leſſen it.

In matters of *ſenſe*, the nearer the object is, the bigger it appears; and the farther diſtant it is from us, the leſs it ſeems to be: But *here* it is quite otherwiſe; men are not ſo apt to value preſent worth, when yet they will reverence it mightily at a diſtance.

I know not whence it comes to paſs, but ſo we certainly find it; that men are more ſenſible of the goodneſs and excellency of any thing, under the want of it, than while they enjoy it; and do uſually value it more when it is gone, than they did whilſt it was preſent with them. Whilſt we live with good men, and converſe with them every day, we take but little notice of them; but no ſooner are they departed but we admire them, and every man's mouth is open to celebrate their good qualities. Perhaps familiarity, and acquaintance, and converſation does inſenſibly beget ſomething of contempt; but whatever the reaſon of it be, we find the thing moſt certainly true in experience.

2. Let us conſider in the next place, for what reaſons the providence of God permits it thus to be. I ſhall mention but theſe *two*.

1. To keep good men humble, and, as the expreſſion is in *Job, to hid pride from men*.

God's providence, in the diſpoſal and ordering of things in this world, ſeems rather to conſult our ſafety, than our ſatisfaction; and the ſecurity of our virtue, than the full reward of it. Now if good men ſhould always meet with that clear eſteem and reputation, which their goodneſs deſerves, they would be in great danger of being puffed up with a proud conceit of themſelves; and pride is enough to ſupplant the greateſt virtue in the world; ſuch *a dead fly*, as this, were ſufficient *to ſpoil a box of the moſt precious ointment*. For man is an ambitious creature, and *vain* above all things; ſo *vain*, as not only to be covetous of praiſe, but even patient of flattery; and the beſt of men lie too open on this blind ſide of human nature; and therefore *God, who knows our frame*, and how apt duſt and aſhes are to be proud, hath in his wiſe and merciful providence ſo diſpoſed things, that good men are ſeldom expoſed to the full force of ſo ſtrong a temptation. And for this reaſon he lets looſe envious and malicious tongues to detract from good men, for a check to the vanity of human nature, and to keep their virtue ſafe, under the protection of humility.

And this is the way likewiſe to ſecure the reputation which they have, and which otherwiſe would be in danger of being loſt: For he that is once proud of the eſteem he hath got, takes the readieſt way to fall into contempt; and certainly it is better of the two, that our reputation ſhould ſuffer a little by the malice of others, than be ruined by our own pride and vanity.

God does not envy good men the reputation of their goodneſs and virtue; but he knows the weakneſs of human nature, and *will not ſuffer it to be tempted, above what it is able*. When good men are grown up to perfection, and able to bear it, as they will be when they come to heaven, their good name ſhall be fully vindicated, and they ſhall have praiſe, not only from men, but from Angels, and from God himſelf.

2. This life is not the proper ſeaſon of reward, but of work and ſervice.

In this life, God is pleaſed to give ſome preſent encouragement to piety and virtue, but reſerves the main of our recompenſe to be beſtowed upon us at the end of our work.

When our *courſe is finiſhed*, then, and not before, we muſt expect our *crown*; when our accounts are caſt up and ſtated, and it appears what improvement we have made of our talents, then will come the *Euge bone ſerve, Well done good and faithful ſervant.* In the mean time, good men muſt be content with ſuch a portion of eſteem, as an envious and ill-natured world will afford them.

And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing I propoſed to enquire into; Whence it comes to paſs, that good men are frequently defrauded of their due praiſe and reputation, while alive. I proceed to the

Second enquiry, namely, What ſecurity good men have of a good name after death,

And the true account of this is to be given, partly from the *providence of God*, and partly from the *nature of the thing*.

(1.) From the *providence of God*; which is concerned herein, upon a *twofold* account.

1. In reſpect of the *equity* of it.
2. In regard of the *example* of it.

1. In reſpect of the *equity* of it. God, who will not be behind-hand with any man, concerns himſelf, to ſecure to good Men the proper Reward of their piety and virtue. Now praiſe is one of the moſt proper recompences of good and virtuous actions; this good men ſeldom meet with in this life, without a great deal of allay and abatement; and therefore the providence of God hath ſo ordered things that it ſhould come in the propereſt ſeaſon, when our work is done, and when we are out of the danger of the temptation of it.

2. In regard of the *example* of it. It is a great argument to virtue, and encouragement to men to act their part well, to ſee good men applauded, when they go off the ſtage. Every man that hath any ſpark of generoſity in him, is deſirous of fame; and tho' men care not how ſoon it comes, yet they will be glad to have it after death, rather than not at all. Piety and virtue would be but very melancholy and uncomfortable things, if they ſhould always be ſo unfortunate, as never to meet with due eſteem and approbation; but when men are aſſured, that they ſhall have this reward, one time or other, and obſerve it to be ſo in experience; this is a great ſpur and encouragement to do virtuouſly: And a great mind, that hath a juſt ſenſe of reputation and a good name, will be content to lay in for it before-hand; and patiently to wait the time which God knows fitteſt for the beſtowing of it.

(2.) The other part of the account of this truth, is to be given from the *nature of the thing:* Becauſe death removes and takes away the chief obſtacle of a good man's reputation. For then his defects are out of ſight, and men are contented that his imperfections ſhould be buried in his grave with him. Death hath put him out of the reach of malice and envy; his worth and excellency does now no longer ſtand in other mens light; his great virtues are at a diſtance; and not ſo apt to be brought into compariſon, to the prejudice and diſadvantage of the living; *mortui non mordent*; the example of the dead, is not ſo cutting a reproof to the vice of the living; the good man is removed out of the way, and his example, how bright ſoever, is not ſo ſcorching and troubleſome at a diſtance; and therefore men are generally contented, to give him his due character.

Beſides, that there is a certain civility in human nature, which will not ſuffer men to wrong the dead, and to deny them the juſt commendation of their worth. Even the *ſcribes* and *phariſees*, (as bad a ſort of men as we can well imagine) though they were juſt like their fathers in perſecuting and ſlaying the prophets, while they were alive; yet had they a mighty veneration for their piety and virtue, after they were dead, and thought no honour too great to be done to them. They would be at the charge of raiſing monuments to the memory of thoſe good men, whom their fathers had ſlain; and whom they would certainly have uſed in the very ſame manner, had they either lived in the days of thoſe prophets, or thoſe prophets had lived in their days, as our Saviour plainly told them.

All that now remains is to draw ſome *inferences* from what hath been ſaid by way of application; and they ſhall be theſe *three*.

1. To vindicate the honour and reſpect which the chriſtian church, for many ages, hath paid to the memory of *the firſt teachers and martyrs* of our religion.

2. To encourage us to piety and goodneſs, from this conſideration; that *the righteous ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance*.

3. That when we pretend to honour the memory of good men, we would be careful to imitate their holineſs and virtue.

1. To vindicate the honour, which the chriſtian church hath for many ages done to *the firſt teachers* and *martyrs* of our religion; I mean more eſpecially to *the holy Apoſtles* of our Lord and Saviour; to whoſe honour, the chriſtian church hath thought fit to ſet apart ſolemn times, for the commemoration of their piety and ſuffering, and to ſtir up others to the imitation of them.

This certainly can with no good colour, either from ſcripture or reaſon, be pretended to be unlawful; and when *David* here ſays, *the righteous ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance*, he cannot certainly be thought to exclude the moſt ſolemn way of commemorating their piety and virtue.

I do not pretend this cuſtom can be derived from the very firſt ages of chriſtianity; but ſurely it is ſufficient, for the lawfulneſs of it, that it is no where forbidden; nay it is rather required here in the text; the beſt way to preſerve the memory of good men, being thus to commemorate them. And it may be of great uſe to us, if it be not our own fault; the ſetting before our eyes the holy lives of excellent men, being in its own nature apt to excite us to the imitation of them.

Beſides that I could tell you, that though this cannot be proved ſo ancient, as ſome vainly pretend; yet it is of great antiquity in the church, and did begin in ſome of the beſt ages of chriſtianity. *Memoriæ Martyrum, the meetings of Chriſtians at the tombs of the martyrs* was practiſed long before the degeneracy of the *weſtern* church; and the Chriſtians were wont at thoſe meetings, ſolemnly to commemorate the faith and conſtancy of thoſe good men, and to encourage themſelves from their examples.

I know very well, that this did in time degenerate into groſs ſuperſtition, which afterward gave colour and occaſion to that groſs and idolatrous practice in the church of *Rome*, of *worſhipping ſaints*. But this abuſe is no ſufficient reaſon for us to give over the celebrating of the memory of ſuch holy men, as *the Apoſtles* and *martyrs* of Chriſt were; and propounding them to ourſelves for our patterns. We may ſtill lawfully give *them their due honour*; tho' the church of *Rome* hath ſo over-done it, as to rob *God* of *his*.

2. Let this conſideration, that *the righteous ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance*, be an encouragement to us to piety and goodneſs. This to a generous nature, that is ſenſible of honour and reputation, is no ſmall reward and encouragement. Before the happineſs of heaven was clearly revealed, and *life and immortality brought to light by the Goſpel*, one of the greateſt motives to worthy and virtuous deeds, was the earneſt deſire which men had of leaving a good name behind them, and of perpetuating the fame and glory of their actions to after-ages. Upon this ground, chiefly, many of the braveſt ſpirits among the heathen were animated to virtue, and, with the hazard of their lives, to do great and glorious exploits for their country.

And certainly it is an argument of a great mind, to be moved by this conſideration, and a ſign of a low and baſe ſpirit to neglect it. He that hath no regard to his fame, is loſt to all purpoſes of virtue and goodneſs; when a man is once come to this, not to care what *others ſay* of him, the next ſtep is, to have no care what *himſelf does*. *Quod conſcientia eſt apud Deum, id fama eſt apud homines*; what conſcience is in reſpect of God, that is fame in reſpect of men. Next to a good conſcience, a clear reputation ought to be to every man the deareſt thing in the world. Men have generally a great value for riches; and yet the ſcripture pronounceth *him* the happier man, that leaves a good name, than him that leaves a great eſtate behind him. *Prov.* xxii. 1. *A good name is rather to be choſen than great riches.*

If then we have any regard to a good name; the beſt way to ſecure it to ourſelves, is by the holy and virtuous actions of a good life. Do well, and thou ſhalt be well ſpoken of; if not now, yet by thoſe who ſhall come after: The ſureſt way to *glory, and honour, and immortality*, is *by a patient continuance in well-doing*. God hath engaged his promiſe to us to this purpoſe, 1 *Sam.* ii. 30. *Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that deſpiſe me, ſhall be lightly eſteemed. The name of the wicked ſhall rot*, ſays *Solomon*, *Prov.* x. 7. But God doth uſually take a particular care to preſerve and vindicate *their* memory, who are careful to *keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.*

3*dly* and *laſtly*, Whenever we pretend to do honour to the memory of good men, let us charge ourſelves with a ſtrict imitation of their holineſs and virtue. The greateſt honour we can do to God, or good men, is to endeavour to be like them; to expreſs their virtues, and repreſent them to the world in our lives. Upon *theſe days*, we ſhould propound to ourſelves, as our patterns, all thoſe holy and excellent perſons, who have gone before us; *the Apoſtles* of our Lord and Saviour, and all thoſe bleſſed *saints* and *martyrs, who were faithful to the death, and have received a crown of life and immortality.*

We ſhould repreſent to ourſelves the piety of their actions, and the patience and conſtancy of their ſufferings, that we may imitate their virtues, and *be followers of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promiſes; and ſeeing we are compaſſed about with ſuch a cloud of witneſſes,* we ſhould *lay aſide every weight, and run with patience the race that is ſet before us.*

Let us imagine all thoſe great examples of piety and virtue, ſtanding about us in a throng, and fixing their eyes upon us. How ought we to demean ourſelves in ſuch a preſence, and under the eye of ſuch witneſſes! And how ſhould we be aſhamed to do any thing that is unworthy of ſuch excellent patterns, and bluſh to look upon *our own* lives, when we remember *theirs!* Good God! at what a diſtance do the greateſt part of Chriſtians follow thoſe examples! and while we honour them with our *lips*, how unlike are we to them in our *lives!*

Why do we thus reproach ourſelves with theſe glorious patterns? Let us either reſolve to imitate their virtues, or to make no mention of their names; for while we celebrate the examples of *ſaints* and *holy men*, and yet contradict them in our lives, we either *mock them*, or *upbraid ourſelves*.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, &c.

SERMON XXIII.

Preach'd on All-Saints day, 1684.

The Duty of imitating the Primitive Teachers, and Patterns of Chriſtianity.

HEB. xiii. 7.

The latter part of the Verſe.

Whoſe Faith follow, conſidering the end of their Converſation.

The whole verſe runs thus,

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have ſpoken unto you the Word of God: whoſe Faith follow, conſidering the end of their Converſation.

THE great ſcope and deſign of this epiſtle, is to perſuade the *Jews* who were newly converted to *chriſtianity*, to continue ſtedfaſt in the profeſſion of it, notwithſtanding all the ſufferings and perſecutions it was attended withal; and to encourage them hereto, among many other arguments which the Apoſtle makes uſe of, he doth ſeveral times in this epiſtle propound to them the examples and patterns of ſaints and holy men, that were gone before them; eſpecially thoſe of their own nation, who, in their reſpective ages, had given remarkable teſtimony of their faith in God, and conſtant adherence to the truth. Chap. vi. 11, 12. *And we deſire, that every one of you do ſhew the ſame diligence, to the full aſſurance of hope, unto the end; that ye be not ſlothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes.* And, Chap. xi. he gives a catalogue of the eminent heroes and ſaints of the Old Teſtament, who *by faith* had done ſuch wonders, and given ſuch teſtimony of their patience and conſtancy, in doing and ſuffering the will of God; from whence he infers, Chap. xii. 1. that we ought to take pattern and heart from ſuch examples,

amples, to perſevere in our chriſtian courſe; *Wherefore ſeeing we alſo are compaſſed about with ſo great a cloud of* martyrs, or *witneſſes, let us lay aſide every weight and the ſin which doth ſo eaſily beſet us, and let us run with patience the race that is ſet before us*; eſpecially ſince they had greater examples than theſe, nearer to them, and more freſh in memory; the great example of our Lord, the founder of our religion; and of the firſt teachers of chriſtianity, the diſciples and Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour. The example of our Lord himſelf, the captain and rewarder of our faith, ver. 2. of that xiith Chapter; *Looking unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame:* verſe 3. *For conſider him who endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, leſt ye be wearied, and faint in your minds.* This indeed is *the great pattern* of Chriſtians, and, in regard of the great perfection of it, ſurpaſſeth all other patterns, and ſeems to make them uſeleſs; as having in it the perfection of the divinity, not in its full brightneſs (which would be apt to dazzle rather than direct us) but allayed and ſhadowed with the infirmities of human nature; and for that reaſon, more accommodate and familiar to us than the divine perfections abſtractedly conſidered.

But yet becauſe our bleſſed Saviour was *God* as well as *man*, and clear of all ſtain of ſin (for though he was clothed with the infirmities, yet he was free from the corruption of human nature) therefore the examples of *mere men*, liable to ſin as we are, may in many reſpects be more ſuitable and accommodate to encourage us to the imitation of thoſe virtues, which are attainable by us, in this ſtate of imperfection; for which reaſon the Apoſtle hath thought fit likewiſe to propoſe to us the higheſt examples of that kind, *the firſt teachers of our religion*; for of theſe he ſeems to ſpeak here in the *text*, namely, thoſe *Apoſtles* or *apoſtolical men*, by whom they had been inſtructed in the faith of Chriſt, but who were now departed this life; it being very probable, that the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of ſuch as were dead, when he ſays, *Remember them which have the rule over you* (or, thoſe that have been your guides) *who have ſpoken to you the word of God, whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation.*

I ſay this is very probable, becauſe he minds them to *remember*, which ſuppoſeth them to be abſent; but eſpecially becauſe he minds them *to conſider the end of their converſation*; by which, ſurely, he means the bleſſed ſtate of thoſe good men after death; which is elſewhere called *the end of our faith, even the ſalvation of our ſouls*, 1 *Pet*. i. 9. So likewiſe, *Rom*. vi. 22. this is ſaid to be the *end* of a holy life; *ye have your fruit unto holineſs, and the end everlaſting life.* And it very much favours this interpretation, that the Apoſtle afterwards ſpeaks of the living guides, and governors of the church, ver. 17. *Obey them which have the rule over you, and ſubmit yourſelves, for they watch for your ſouls.*

So that it is highly probable, that the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of ſuch guides, and governors of the church, as had once been over them, but were now departed this life; and therefore he might, with more freedom and leſs envy, recommend their example to them, and bid them *call to mind their faith*, and exemplary converſation among them, and propoſe it for a pattern to themſelves, conſidering the happy *end* of it, *viz.* the bleſſed ſtate they were now in, and the glorious reward they were made partakers of in another life.

In the words thus explained, you have,

I. A duty enjoined, which is, to propoſe to ourſelves, for our imitation, the examples of good men that have gone before us; eſpecially the primitive patterns of chriſtianity, and the firſt teachers of our religion. *Remember them which have been your guides, and have ſpoken to you the word of God, whoſe faith follow.*

II. The motive or encouragement to it, from the conſideration of the reward of it; *conſidering the end of their converſation.*

I. The duty enjoined; which is to propoſe to ourſelves, for our imitation, the example of good men that have gone before us; eſpecially the primitive patterns of chriſtianity, and firſt teachers of our religion. *Remember them that have had the rule over you, that have been your guides, and have ſpoken to you the word of God, whoſe faith follow.* In which words the Apoſtle bids them call to mind their firſt guides and inſtructors in chriſtianity, whom they had known, and heard, and converſed with in this world, but who were now *reſted from their labours*, and were receiving the reward of them; to remember the doctrines they had heard from them, and the virtues they had ſeen in them; and to embrace the one, and imitate the other.

Thus we cannot remember the primitive teachers, and patterns of chriſtianity, the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour; becauſe *we* did not perſonally know them, and converſe with them, living at the diſtance of many ages, from their time: But we may do that which is equivalent, and a kind of remembrance of them; we may commemorate their faith, and the virtue and holineſs of their lives; and what we hear and read of them, we may propoſe for patterns to ourſelves, and copy them out in our lives and actions: And this is *our* duty, and the ſame in ſubſtance with *theirs*, who had the happineſs to know and converſe with thoſe excellent perſons, to hear them preach, and to ſee the rules and precepts of that holy doctrine, which they taught, exemplified in their lives.

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall do theſe *three* things.

Firſt, Shew why amongſt all the examples of good men, we ſhould more eſpecially propoſe to our imitation, the *primitive* teachers, and patterns of our religion.

Secondly, Wherein we ſhould imitate them. The Apoſtle expreſſeth it in one word, in their faith, *whoſe faith follow*.

Thirdly, The encouragement to this, from the conſideration of the happy ſtate they are in, and the glorious rewards they are made partakers of; *conſidering the end of their converſation*.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew why among all the examples of good men, we ſhould more eſpecially propoſe to our imitation, the *primitive* teachers and patterns of our religion, I mean, the holy Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour, *whoſe faith* we ſhould endeavour *to follow*, and to imitate the holineſs and virtue of their converſation. For *theſe* certainly come neareſt to that moſt perfect, and excellent pattern of all goodneſs, *our bleſſed Saviour*, and are the faireſt *tranſcripts* of that unblemiſhed *original*. Hence it is that St. *Paul* ſo frequently exhorts Chriſtians to imitate *his* example, and the examples of the other *Apoſtles*; it being reaſonable to preſume, that *they* came neareſt to the pattern of our Lord, 1 *Cor*. xi. 1. *Be ye followers of me, even as I alſo am of Chriſt*. Phil. iii. 17. *Brethren, be ye followers together of me, and mark them which walk ſo, as ye have us for an enſample. For our converſation is in heaven.*

And this is reaſonable, that the *firſt* in every kind ſhould be *the rule and pattern* of the reſt, and of all that follow after; becauſe it is likely to be moſt perfect. In proceſs of time, the beſt inſtitutions are apt to decline, and by inſenſible degrees to ſwerve, and depart from the perfection of their firſt ſtate; and therefore it is a good rule, to preſerve things from corruption and degeneracy, often to look back to the firſt inſtitution, and by that to correct thoſe imperfections and errors, which will almoſt unavoidably creep in with time.

If we would preſerve that purity of faith and manners, which our religion requires, we ſhould have frequent recourſe to the primitive teachers and patterns of chriſtianity, and endeavour to bring our belief and lives to as near a conformity with theirs, as is poſſible. Who ſo likely to deliver the faith and doctrine of Chriſt pure, and uncorrupted, as the primitive teachers of it, who receiv'd it from our Lord himſelf; and were, by an extraordinary aſſiſtance of the holy Spirit, ſecured from error and miſtake in the delivery of it? And who ſo likely to bring their lives and converſations to an exact conformity with his holy doctrine, as they, who were ſo thoroughly inſtructed in it by the beſt maſter, and ſhewn the practice of it in the moſt perfect example of holineſs and virtue? Great reaſon there is therefore, why all chriſtians ſhould follow *their* faith, and make *their* converſation more eſpecially the patterns of their lives.

The want of a due regard to theſe *fountains* of chriſtian doctrine, and the *firſt* and *beſt* patterns of chriſtian practice, hath been the great cauſe of that foul degeneracy of the *Romiſh* church, both in the doctrine and practice of chriſtianity, they do not follow the faith of the *Apoſtles*, the *firſt fathers* and teachers of *chriſtianity*; but of *the fathers of the council of Lateran, and Trent*. Thus have they *forſaken the fountain of living waters* the holy ſcriptures, *and have hewn to themſelves broken ciſterns, that will hold no water*; the doctrines and traditions of men. Nay, they have ſtopt up this *fountain of living waters* from the people, and forbid them to come to it; and forced them to drink of thoſe impure and puddled ſtreams, which they let out to them; and inſtead of the lives of *the holy Apoſtles*, and thoſe eminent *graces* and *virtues* which ſhined forth in them, they repreſent to them the patterns of *new ſaints*; ſome of which *neither they nor their fathers knew*, and indeed never were in being; as St. *Almanach*, and St. *Synoris*, and ſeveral others; many of them ſo far from being *ſaints*, that they may be reckoned among the *worſt* of men; (for inſtance, our countryman *Thomas a Becket*, who for pride and rebellion may almoſt vye with *Lucifer* himſelf; and yet this ill man, and worſt of ſubjects, was canonized to that height, as for two hundred years together, to ingroſs the worſhip of theſe weſtern parts of the world, and to impoveriſh the ſhrines of all other ſaints, even of *the bleſſed Virgin* herſelf;) others, ſuch *idiots*, or hot-headed *fanaticks*, that he that reads their Lives would take them to be *fools and mad-men* rather than *ſaints* (as *Francis* and *Dominic*, and *Ignatius Loyola*, and ſeveral others of the ſame ſtamp;) and many the very beſt of them, ſo diſguiſed by their legends, that inſtead of the ſubſtantial virtues of a good life, their ſtory is made up of falſe and fantaſtical miracles, and ridiculous freaks of ſuperſtition.

All which conſidered, there is great reaſon why we ſhould have recourſe to the *primitive* patterns of faith and holineſs, *and be followers of them, who* we are ſure *were followers of Chriſt.* I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed, namely, wherein we ſhould imitate theſe patterns. And the Apoſtle expreſſeth it in one word, in their faith, *whoſe faith follow.* And the word *faith* is frequently in the New Teſtament uſed ſo largely, as to comprehend the whole condition of the Goſpel; a firm belief of the doctrine of it, and the fruit and effect of this belief, in a good converſation. And that *faith* here in the *text*, takes in a holy life, is evident from what follows, *whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation*; from whence it is evident, that the Apoſtle ſpeaks of ſuch a *faith*, as ſhews forth itſelf in a good *converſation.*

So that we may very well ſuppoſe the Apoſtle here to recommend *the primitive faith* to our imitation in theſe *four* reſpects.

1. In regard of the *ſincerity* and *purity* of it.
2. In regard of the *firmneſs* and *ſtability* of it.
3. Of their *conſtancy* and *perſeverance* in it.
4. Of the *efficacy* and *fruitfulneſs* of it, in a good converſation. All theſe may be collected from the expreſſions and circumſtances of the *text.*

1. We are to imitate theſe *primitive* patterns, in the *ſincerity* and *purity* of their faith, I mean, that the faith which we profeſs, be the ſincere doctrine of chriſtianity, and the pure word of God, free from all mixture of human additions and inventions, and not made up, as the faith of the *Phariſees* was among the *Jews*, and theirs of the church of *Rome* is at this day, of *the word of God*, and the *doctrines and traditions of men*; not like the *creed* of pope *Pius* IV. (which is now the ſtandard of the *Roman* faith) conſiſting of the twelve *old* Articles of the chriſtian faith, delivered to us by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and as many *new* ones, coined and ſtamped by their later Councils. This is not *to follow the faith* of the Apoſtles, and firſt patterns of chriſtianity, *the faith once delivered to the ſaints*, as St. *Jude* calls it. This is to have our faith ſtand upon the authority of men, and not on the word of God; whereas we are *to follow the faith of the firſt guides* of the chriſtian church, *who ſpake unto them the word of God*, as the Apoſtle expreſly chargeth here in the *text.*

2. We are to imitate them, in the *ſtability* and *firmneſs* of our faith, and not ſuffer ourſelves to be *ſhaken*, and removed from it, *by every wind of new doctrine*; the faith of Chriſt being unchangeable, as Chriſt himſelf. And that by following the faith of the primitive guides and teachers of chriſtianity, the Apoſtle here means, that we ſhould *be ſtedfaſt and unmoveable* in it, is plain from what follows immediately after the text; *whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation.* Jeſus Chriſt, *the ſame yeſterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with diverſe and ſtrange doctrines: for it is a good thing, that the heart be eſtabliſhed with grace*, that is, in the doctrine of the Goſpel, which is frequently called *the grace of God.*

3. We are to imitate them, in the *conſtancy* and *perſeverance* of their Faith; and that notwithſtanding all the diſcountenance and oppoſition, the perſecution and ſuffering which attend the profeſſion of this faith; which the Apoſtle ſufficiently imitates in this epiſtle, to have been the condition of thoſe Chriſtians, to whom he wrote; and therefore he propoſeth ſo many examples to them, of conſtant and patient ſuffering for God and his truth; and it is probable enough, that the Apoſtle here recommends the example of thoſe who were the primitive *martyrs*, as well as teachers of chriſtianity. He had before propoſed to them the *living* examples of thoſe, who were under actual perſecution and ſufferings for the Goſpel, ver. 3. *Remember thoſe that are in bonds, and thoſe that ſuffer adverſity*; and here in the ſeventh verſe he ſeems to propoſe the pattern of thoſe, who had laid down their lives and *died* for the faith; *Remember thoſe who have been your guides, and have ſpoken to you the word of God, whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation*, τὴν ἔκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς, which may be rendred, *the laſt*

act of their lives, the manner of their going out of the world, perhaps by martyrdom; as if he had ſaid, imitate them in their conſtancy and perſeverance in the faith, even to the laſt, in laying down their lives for it. And thus we ſhould be ready to do, if God calls us to it. However, it is certain the Apoſtle meant their conſtancy and perſeverance in the faith to the laſt, and their dying *in*, if not *for* the faith of Chriſt. And this is neceſſary, if we expect *the crown of life*, and hope for the ſame happy end, which they had; for none but *they*, *that continue to the end, ſhall be ſaved*.

4. We ſhould imitate them in the *efficacy* and *fruitfulneſs* of their faith, in the practice and virtues of a good life; *whoſe faith follow, conſidering the end of their converſation*, that is, their perſeverance in *a holy courſe* to the end. And theſe muſt never be ſeparated; *a ſound faith*, and *a good life*. Without this, *our faith* is barren and *dead*, as St. *James* tells us, chap. ii. ver. 17. Our knowledge and belief of the chriſtian doctrine, muſt manifeſt itſelf in a good converſation. *Who is a wiſe man* (ſays the ſame St. *James*, chap. iii. ver. 13.) *Who is a wiſe man, and endowed with knowledge amongſt you? Let him ſhew out of a good converſation his works. This is a faithful ſaying*, ſaith St. *Paul* to *Titus*, chap. iii. ver. 8. *and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works.*

And herein the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour were eminent examples. They lived as they taught, and practiſed the doctrine which they preached. So St. *Paul* ſtrictly chargeth *Timothy*, 1 *Tim.* iv. 12. *Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in converſation, in charity, in faith, in purity.* And our Saviour tells us, that hereby chiefly falſe prophets and teachers might be known from the true Apoſtles of Chriſt, *Matth.* vii. 20. *By their fruits ye ſhall know them.* And indeed we do not *follow the faith* of thoſe excellent perſons, if we do not *abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which by Jeſus Chriſt are to the praiſe and glory of God.* I come now to the

Third and *laſt* thing I propoſed, *viz.* the encouragement to this, from the conſideration of the happy ſtate of thoſe perſons, who are propoſed to us for patterns, and the glorious reward which they are made partakers of in another world. *Conſidering the end of their converſation*, τὴν ἔκβασιν, *their egreſs* or *departure* out of this life, into a bleſſed and glorious ſtate, where they have received the crown and reward of their faith and patience, and pious converſation in this world; or elſe (which comes much to one) *conſidering the concluſion of their lives*, with what patience and comfort they left the world, and with what joyful aſſurance of the happy condition they were going to, and were to continue in for ever.

And this is a great encouragement to conſtancy and perſeverance in faith and holineſs, to ſee with what chearfulneſs and comfort good men die, and with what a firm and ſteddy perſuaſion of the happineſs they are entering upon. For who would not be glad to leave the world, in that calmneſs and ſerenity of mind, and comfortable aſſurance of a bleſſed eternity? Bad men wiſh this, and are ready to ſay with *Balaam*, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my laſt end be like his.* But if we would have the comfort of *ſuch a death*, we muſt live *ſuch lives*, and imitate the faith and good converſation of thoſe, whom we deſire to reſemble in the manner of their death, and to go into the ſame happy ſtate that they are in after death. If we do not make their *lives* our pattern; we muſt not expect to be conformable to them, in the happy manner of their *death*. When we hear of the death of an eminently good man, we do not doubt but he is happy; and are confident, that he will meet with the reward of his piety and goodneſs in another world. If we believe this of him, let us endeavour to be like him; that we may attain the ſame happineſs, which we believe him to be poſſeſſed of, and, as the Apoſtle exhorts, chap. vi. 12. *Let us not be ſlothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes.* Let us *ſhew the ſame diligence* that they did; that we may have the ſame *full aſſurance of hope unto the end*, which they had.

The *inference* from this diſcourſe, which I have made upon this argument, is, to ſhew what uſe we ought to make of theſe excellent examples, which are ſet before us, of the firſt founders and teachers of our religion, and what is the proper honour and reſpect, which we ought to pay to their memory: Not *invocation* and *adoration*; but a zealous *imitation* of their faith, and good converſation. The greateſt honour we can do them, the moſt acceptable to God, the moſt grateful to them, and the moſt beneficial to ourſelves, is to endeavour to be like them: Not to make any images, and likeneſs of them, to fall down before them, and worſhip them; but to form the image of their faith and virtues upon our hearts and lives: Not to pray to them; but to praiſe God for ſuch bright and glorious examples, and to endeavour with all our might to imitate their faith, and patience, and piety, and humility, and meekneſs, and charity, and all thoſe other virtues which were ſo reſplendent in them. And this is *to remember* the founders of our religion as we ought, *to follow their faith*, and *to conſider the end of their converſation.*

Had the chriſtian religion required, or intended any ſuch thing, as of latter times hath been practiſed in the world; it had been as eaſy for the Apoſtle to have ſaid, *Remember them that have been your guides, and have ſpoken to you the word of God, to erect images to them, and to worſhip them with due veneration, and to pray to them and make uſe of their interceſſion.* But no ſuch thing is ſaid, or the leaſt intimation given of it, either in this text, or any other in the whole Bible; but very much to the contrary.

Their example indeed is frequently recommended to us, for our imitation and encouragement; and for this reaſon, the providence of God hath taken particular care, that the memory of the Apoſtles, and ſo many primitive Chriſtians and martyrs, ſhould be tranſmitted to poſterity; that Chriſtians in all ſucceeding ages might propound theſe patterns to themſelves, and have perpetually before their eyes the piety and virtue of their lives, and their patient and conſtant ſufferings for the truth; that when God ſhall pleaſe to call us to the like trial, *we may not be wearied and faint in our minds*; *but being compaſſed about with ſuch a cloud of witneſſes*, having ſo many examples in our eye of thoſe, *who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes*, and do now as it were look down from their happy ſtate upon us here below, who are combating with manifold temptations, to ſee how we behave and acquit ourſelves in our chriſtian courſe, we may take encouragement to ourſelves, from ſuch examples, and ſuch ſpectators, to *run with patience the race which is ſet before us.*

I know indeed that other uſe than this hath been, and is at this day made of the memory of the ſaints and martyrs of former ages, very diſhonourable to God, and very grievous to them, if they be ſenſible of what is done here below; I mean to worſhip them, and to pray to them, and (to the great diſparagement of the powerful interceſſion of *our great high-prieſt, Jeſus the Son of God)* to make them the mediators and interceſſors in heaven with God for us. Of this the ſcripture hath no where given us the leaſt intimation; but hath expreſly commanded the contrary, *to worſhip the Lord our God, and him only to ſerve*; *and to pray to him alone, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, who is the only mediator betwixt God and man.* Nor are there any footſteps of any ſuch practice, in the primitive church, for the firſt three hundred years; as is acknowledged by our moſt learned adverſaries of the church of *Rome.*

The ſcripture no where propounds the ſaints to us, for *objects of our worſhip*; but for *the patterns of our lives.* This is the greateſt reſpect and veneration, that we can, or ought to pay to them; and whatever is beyond this, is *a voluntary humility*, injurious to God and our bleſſed Saviour, and moſt certainly diſpleaſing to thoſe, whom we pretend to honour; if they know how men play the fool about them here below.

Let us then endeavour to be like them, in the holy and virtuous actions of their lives, in their conſtant patience and ſuffering for the truth; if God ſhall call us thereto. And we may be like them, if we do but ſincerely endeavour it, and pray to God for his grace and aſſiſtance to that end. For theſe examples were not left for our *admiration* only; but for our *imitation.* We frequently read the lives of the Apoſtles and firſt founders of our religion: But I know not how it comes to paſs, we chooſe rather lazily to *admire* them, than vigorouſly to *follow* them; as if the piety of the firſt Chriſtians were *miraculous*, and not at all intended for the imitation of ſucceeding ages; as if heaven and earth, God and men, and all things were altered, ſince that time; as if chriſtianity were then in its youthful age and vigour, but is ſince decayed, and grown old, and hath quite loſt its power and virtue. And indeed the generality of Chriſtians live at ſuch a faint and careleſs rate, as to make the world believe, that either all the ſtories of the primitive Chriſtians are fables; or elſe, that the force of chriſtianity is ſtrangely abated, and that the Holy Spirit of God hath forſaken the earth, and is retired to the Father. But truth never grows old, and thoſe laws of goodneſs and righteouſneſs, which are contained in the Goſpel, are ſtill as reaſonable, and apt to gain upon the minds of men, as ever. God is the ſame he was, and our bleſſed Saviour is ſtill at the right hand of God, interceding powerfully for ſinners, for *mercy and grace to help in time of need.* The promiſes and threatenings of the Goſpel are ſtill as true and powerful as ever; and the Holy Spirit of God is ſtill in the world, and effectually works in them that believe.

Let us not then deceive ourſelves in this matter. The primitive Chriſtians were *men like ourſelves, ſubject to the ſame paſſions that we are*, and *compaſſed about with the ſame infirmities*; ſo that although that extraordinary ſpirit and power of miracles, which God endowed them withal, for the firſt planting and propagating of the Goſpel in the world, be now ceaſed; yet the ſanctifying power and virtue of God's holy Spirit, does ſtill accompany the Goſpel, and is ready to aſſiſt us in every good work.

In a word, we have all that is neceſſary to work the ſame graces and virtues in us, which were in them; and if we be not ſlothful, and wanting to ourſelves, we may *follow their faith*, and at laſt *attain the end of it, even the ſalvation of our ſouls.*

Let us then, from an idle admiring of thoſe excellent patterns, proceed to a vigorous imitation of them, and be ſo far from being diſcouraged by the excellency of them, as to make even *that* matter and ground of encouragement to ourſelves; according to that of *Tertullian*, *Admonetur omnis ætas fieri poſſe, quod aliquando factum eſt*; *all ages to the end of the world may be convinced, that what hath been done, is poſſible to be done.* There have been ſuch holy and excellent perſons in the world; and therefore it is poſſible for men to be ſuch.

Let us not then be ſlothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes. Since we are compaſſed about with ſuch a cloud of witneſſes; let us lay aſide every weight, and the ſin which ſo eaſily beſets us, and let us run with patience the race which is ſet before us, looking unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the Croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame, and is now ſet down at the right hand of God.

SERMON XXIV.

Preach'd on All-Saints day.

The Encouragement to ſuffer for Chriſt; and the Danger of denying him.

2 TIM. ii. 11, 12.

It is a faithful ſaying; For if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him: If we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him: If we deny him, he alſo will deny us.

IN the beginning of this chapter, St. *Paul* encourageth *Timothy* to continue ſtedfaſt in the profeſſion of the Goſpel, notwithſtanding the ſufferings which attended it; ver. 1. *Thou therefore my ſon, be ſtrong in the grace which is in Chriſt Jeſus*; and ver. 3. *Thou therefore endure hardſhip, as a good ſoldier of Jeſus Chriſt.* And to animate him in his reſolution, he quotes *a ſaying*, which it ſeems was well known and firmly believed among Chriſtians; *a ſaying* on the one hand full of encouragement to thoſe who with patience and conſtancy ſuffered for their religion; and on the other hand, full of terror to thoſe who for fear of ſuffering denied it.

It is a faithful ſaying. This is a preface uſed by this Apoſtle, to introduce ſome remarkable ſentence, of more than ordinary weight and concernment; 1 Tim. i. 15. *This is a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave ſinners*: and chap. iv. 8, 9. *Godlineſs is profitable unto all things, having a promiſe of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation*, Titus iii. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.* And here in the text, the ſame preface is uſed to ſignify the importance of *the ſaying* he was about to mention; *It is a faithful ſaying; if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him: If we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him: If we deny him, he alſo will deny us.*

The firſt two ſentences are matter of encouragement to thoſe who ſuffer with Chriſt, and for him, and are the very ſame in ſenſe. *If we be dead with him,* that is, if we lay down our lives for the teſtimony of the truth, as he did, *we ſhall alſo live with him,* that is, we ſhall in like manner be made partakers of immortality, as he is: *If we ſuffer* or endure as he did, *we ſhall alſo reign with him* in glory.

The other ſentence is matter of terror to thoſe who deny him and his truth. *If we deny him, he alſo will deny us*; to which is ſubjoined another *ſaying* much to the ſame ſenſe; *if we believe not,* εἰ ἀπιςοῦμεν, *if we be unfaithful*; *yet he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himſelf*; that is, he will be as good as his word, and make good that ſolemn threatning which he hath denounced againſt thoſe, who ſhall for fear of ſuffering deny him, and his truth.

The words being thus explained, I ſhall begin with the *firſt* part of this remakable *ſaying*; *If we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him: If we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him.* This, it ſeems, was a noted *ſaying* among Chriſtians; and whether they had it by tradition of our Saviour, or whether it was in familiar uſe among the Apoſtles, as a very proper and powerful argument to keep Chriſtians ſtedfaſt to their religion, I cannot determine. It is certain, that *ſayings* to this ſenſe are very frequent, eſpecially in the epiſtles of St. *Paul*. *Rom.* vi. 5. *For if we have been planted together in the likeneſs of his death; we ſhall be alſo in the likeneſs of his reſurrection.* And ver. 8. *Now if we be dead with Chriſt; we believe that we ſhall alſo live with him.* 2 Cor. iv. 10. *Always bearing about in the body, the dying of our Lord Jeſus; that the life alſo of Jeſus might be made manifeſt in our body.* And ver. 11. *For we which live, are always delivered unto death for Jeſus ſake; that the life alſo of Jeſus might be made manifeſt in our mortal fleſh.* And *Rom.* viii. 17. *If ſo be that we ſuffer with him, that we may be alſo glorified together.* Phil. iii. 10, 11. *That I may know him, and the power of his reſurrection, and the fellowſhip of his ſufferings, being made conformable unto his death: If by any means I might attain unto the reſurrection of the dead,* 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. *Beloved, think it not ſtrange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though ſome ſtrange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inaſmuch as ye are partakers of Chriſt's ſufferings; that when his glory ſhall be revealed, ye may be glad alſo with exceeding joy.*

You ſee that the ſenſe of this *ſaying* was in frequent uſe among the Apoſtles, as a powerful argument to encourage Chriſtians to conſtancy in their religion, notwithſtanding the dangers and ſufferings which attended it. *This is a faithful ſaying: If we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him: If we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him.*

And the force of this argument will beſt appear, by taking into conſideration theſe *two* things;

I. What virtue there is in a firm belief and perſuaſion of a bleſſed immortality in another world, to ſupport and bear up mens ſpirits under the greateſt ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake; and even to animate them, if God ſhall call them to it, to lay down their lives for their religion.

II. How it may be made out to be reaſonable, for men to embrace and voluntarily to ſubmit to preſent and grievous ſufferings, in hopes of a future happineſs and reward; concerning which we have not, nor perhaps are capable of having, the ſame degree of certainty and aſſurance which we have of the evils and ſufferings of this preſent life.

I. What virtue there is in a firm belief and perſuaſion of a bleſſed immortality in another world, to ſupport and bear up mens ſpirits under the greateſt ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake; and even to animate them, if God ſhall call them to it, to lay down their lives for their religion.

If men do firmly believe that they ſhall change this temporal and miſerable life for an endleſs ſtate of happineſs and glory, that they ſhall meet with a reward of their ſufferings infinitely beyond the proportion of them, both in the weight and duration of it; this muſt needs turn the ſcales on that ſide, on which there is the greateſt weight: And there is a ſufficient ground for a firm belief of this. For if any thing can certainly be concluded from the providence of God, this may, that good men ſhall be happy one time or other: And becauſe they are very often great ſufferers in this life; that there is another ſtate remains for them after this life, wherein they ſhall meet with a full reward of all their ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake.

But beſides the reaſonableneſs of this, from the conſideration of God's providence, we have now a clear and expreſs revelation of it; *life and immortality being brought* *to light by the goſpel.* This St. *John* tells us is the *great promiſe* of the Goſpel, 1 *John* ii. 25. *This is the promiſe which he hath promiſed us; even eternal life.* And *this promiſe,* our Saviour moſt expreſly makes to thoſe who ſuffer for him: *Matth.* v. 10, 11, 12. *Bleſſed are they which are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you and perſecute you, and ſay all manner of evil againſt you falſly for my ſake, rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.* Mark x. 29, 30. *Verily I ſay unto you, there is no man that hath left houſe, or brethren, or ſiſters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my ſake and the Goſpel's, but he ſhall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, with perſecutions,* (that is, ſo far as a ſtate of perſecution would admit) *and in the world to come eternal life.*

And if ſuch a perſuaſion be firmly fixed in our minds; the faith of another world, and the aſſured hope of eternal life and happineſs, muſt needs have a mighty force and efficacy upon the minds of ſober and conſiderate men; becauſe there is no proportion between ſuffering for a little while, and being unſpeakably and eternally happy. So St. *Paul* tells us he calculated the matter, *Rom.* viii. 18. *I reckon* (ſays he) *that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which ſhall be revealed in us.* The vaſt diſproportion between the ſufferings of a few days, and the joys and glory of eternity, when it is once firmly believed by us, will weigh down all the evils and calamities of this world, and give us courage and conſtancy under them. For why ſhould *we faint,* if we believe that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?* as the ſame St. *Paul* aſſures us, 2 *Cor.* iv. 17. If our minds be but thoroughly poſſeſſed with the hopes of a reſurrection to a better and happier life; this will make death, attended even with extremity of terror, to be tolerable; as we read of ſome, in that long catalogue of ſaints and martyrs, *Heb.* xi. 35. *Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better reſurrection.* It would make a man to rejoice in the ruin and diſſolution of *this earthly tabernacle,* to be aſſured that *when it is diſſolved, we ſhall have a building of God, a houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,* as the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us, 2 *Cor.* v. 1. Thus you ſee what virtue there is in the firm belief and perſuaſion of a better life, to bear up mens ſpirits under thoſe ſufferings and torments which may ſeem *unſupportable* to human nature.

And *ſo* indeed they would *be,* without an extraordinary grace and aſſiſtance of God to enable them to bear thoſe ſufferings, which his providence permits them to be exerciſed withal. But of *this extraordinary grace,* we are aſſured, not only from the conſideration of the attributes and providence of God; but likewiſe from the expreſs promiſes and declarations of his word.

The attributes of God and his providence give us good ground to believe that *he* who loves goodneſs and righteouſneſs, and hath a peculiar favour and regard for good men, will never ſuffer his faithful friends and ſervants to be brought into that diſtreſs for righteouſneſs ſake, that they ſhall not be able to endure thoſe evils and afflictions which befal them upon that account: And if in the courſe of his providence, any thing happen to them that is above the ordinary conſtancy and patience of human nature to bear, that in ſuch a caſe, God will extraordinarily interpoſe, and give them ſtrength and patience, ſupport and comfort, proportionable to the evils and ſufferings that are upon them; and that he will either lighten their burden, or add to their ſtrength; he will either mitigate their pain, or increaſe their patience; either he will check and reſtrain the effect of natural cauſes, as in the caſe of the *three children,* that were in the fiery furnace; and of *Daniel* who was caſt into the den of lions: or elſe (which comes to the ſame iſſue) if he will ſuffer cauſes to have their natural courſe, he will afford ſupernatural comforts to balance the fury and extremity of them. This is very credible, from the mere conſideration of God's goodneſs, and of the particular care and favour of his providence towards good men.

But beſides *this,* we have the expreſs promiſe and declaration of God's word to this purpoſe, which puts us out of all doubt concerning that which we had good reaſon to hope and expect before, 1 *Cor.* x. 13. St. *Paul* there tells the Chriſtians at *Corinth,* that though they had met with ſome troubles, yet they had not been tried with the extremity of ſuffering: but when that ſhould happen, they had no cauſe to doubt, but God would enable them to bear it. *There hath no temptation taken you, but ſuch as is common to man;* that is, you have not yet been exerciſed with any trial, but what is human; what the ordinary ſtrength and reſolution of human nature is able to bear: but in caſe it ſhould come to extreme ſuffering, and that they muſt either comply with the heathen idolatry, or endure extremity of torments; they had the promiſe of God's help to ſupport them in that caſe. *God is faithful*, ſays he, *who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it*; and then it follows, *wherefore my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry*; that is, let no ſuffering that you are tempted withal, make you guilty of *this ſin*. And 1 *Pet.* iv. 14. the preſence of God's Spirit, in a very glorious manner, for our ſupport and comfort, is promiſed to thoſe who ſuffer for him. *If ye be reproached for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you.*

And *this* conſideration of God's ſtrength to ſupport us under ſufferings, makes the *other*, of the reward of them, a perfect and complete encouragement; which it could not be, without it. For if, upon the whole matter, the preſent ſufferings of good men were intolerable, and human nature were not divinely aſſiſted to bear them; how great ſoever the future reward promiſed to them ſhould be; they that lay under them, would be forced to conſult their own preſent eaſe and deliverance. I proceed to the

IId Thing I propoſed to conſider, namely, how it may be made out to be reaſonable to embrace and voluntarily to ſubmit to preſent and grievous ſufferings, in hopes of future happineſs and reward; concerning which we have not, nor perhaps are capable of having the ſame degree of certainty and aſſurance, which we have of the evils and ſufferings of this preſent life.

Now, granting that we have not the ſame degree of certainty concerning our future happineſs, that we have of our preſent ſufferings, which we feel, or ſee juſt ready to come upon us; yet prudence making it neceſſary for men to run this hazard, does juſtify the reaſonableneſs of it. This I take to be *a known and ruled caſe* in the common affairs of life, and in matters of temporal concernment; and men act upon this principle every day. The husbandman parts with his corn, and caſts it into the earth, in confidence that it will ſpring up again, and at the time of harveſt bring him a conſiderable return and advantage. He parts with a certainty, in hope only of a great future benefit: and though he have no demonſtration, for the infallible ſucceſs of his labour and hazard; yet he acts very reaſonably: becauſe if he does not take this courſe, he runs a greater and more certain hazard, of periſhing by famine at laſt, when his preſent ſtock is ſpent. The caſe of the merchant is the ſame, who parts with a preſent eſtate, in hopes of a future improvement; which yet is not ſo certain as what he parts withal.

And if this be reaſonable in *theſe* caſes; then the hazard which men run, upon much greater aſſurance than either the husbandman or the merchant hath, is much more reaſonable. When we part with this life in hopes of one infinitely better, that is, *in ſure and certain hope of a reſurrection to eternal life*; and when we ſubmit to preſent ſufferings, to avoid an eternity of miſery, which is much more to be dreaded than temporal want, this is reaſonable; becauſe here is a much greater advantage in view, and a more preſſing neceſſity in the caſe; nothing being ſo deſirable to one that muſt live for ever, as to be happy for ever; and nothing to be avoided by him with ſo much care, as everlaſting miſery and ruin. And for our ſecurity of obtaining the one, and eſcaping the other, we have *the promiſe of God, who cannot lye*: which is all the certainty and ſecurity that things future and inviſible are capable of.

Nay, I will go lower. If God had made no expreſs promiſe and declaration of a future happineſs and reward, to thoſe that ſerve him and ſuffer for him: yet if any man out of a ſincere love to God, and awful regard to his laws, endure trouble and affliction, if there be a God and providence, this is aſſurance enough to us, that our ſervices and ſufferings ſhall one time or other be conſidered and rewarded. For as ſure as any man is, that there is a God, and that his providence regards the actions of men; ſo ſure are we, that no man ſhall finally be a loſer by any thing that he doth or ſuffers for him.

So that the matter is now brought to this plain iſſue, that if it be reaſonable to believe there is a God, and that his providence regards and conſiders the actions of men; it is alſo reaſonable to endure preſent ſufferings, in hope of a future reward: and there is certainly enough in this caſe, to govern and determine a prudent man, that is in any good meaſure perſuaded of another life after this, and hath any tolerable conſideration of, and regard to his eternal intereſt.

Indeed, if we were ſure, that there were no life after this; if we had no expectation of a happineſs or miſery beyond this world; the wiſeſt thing that any man could do, would be to enjoy as much of the preſent contentments and ſatisfactions of this world, as he could fairly come at. For *if there be no reſurrection to another life*, the Apoſtle allows the reaſoning of the *Epicure* to be very good, *Let us eat and drink*, *for to morrow we die*. But on the other hand, if it be true that we are deſigned for immortality, and that another ſtate remains for us after this life, wherein we ſhall be unſpeakably happy, or intolerably and eternally miſerable, according as we have behaved ourſelves in this world; it is then evidently reaſonable, that men ſhould take the greateſt care of the longeſt duration, and be content to bear, and diſpenſe with ſome preſent trouble and inconvenience, for a felicity that will have no end; and be willing to labour and take pains, and deny our preſent eaſe and comfort for a little while, that we may be happy for ever. This is reckoned prudence in the account of this world, for a man to part with a preſent poſſeſſion and enjoyment, for a much greater advantage in reverſion: But ſurely the diſproportion between *time* and *eternity* is *ſo vaſt*, that did men but firmly believe that they ſhall *live for ever*, nothing in this world could reaſonably be thought too good to part withal, or too grievous to ſuffer, for the obtaining of a bleſſed immortality.

In the virtue of this belief and perſuaſion, the primitive Chriſtians were fortified, againſt all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do againſt them; and they thought they made a very wiſe bargain, if *through many tribulations they might* at laſt *enter into the kingdom of God*; becauſe they believed, that the joys of heaven would abundantly recompenſe all their ſorrows and ſufferings upon earth. And ſo confident were they of this, that they looked upon it as a ſpecial favour and regard of God to them, to call them to ſuffer for his name. So St. *Paul* ſpeaks of it, *Phil.* i. 29. *unto you it is given*, *on the behalf of Chriſt*, *not only to believe on him*, *but alſo to ſuffer for his ſake*. Yea, they accounted *them* happy, who upon this account were miſerable in this world. So St. *James* expreſly pronounceth of them, *James* i. 12. *Bleſſed is the man that endureth temptation*; (meaning the temptation of perſecution and ſuffering) *for when he is tried*, *he ſhall receive the crown of life*, *which the Lord hath promiſed to them that love him*. And this conſideration was that, which kept up their ſpirits from ſinking under the weight of their greateſt ſufferings. So St. *Paul* tells us, 2 *Cor.* iv. 14, 16. *Knowing that he which raiſed up the Lord Jeſus*, *ſhall raiſe up us alſo by Jeſus*. *For which cauſe we faint not*; *but though our outward man periſh*, *yet the inward man is renewed day by day*. The ſufferings of their bodies, did but help to raiſe and fortify their ſpirits: nay, ſo far were they from fainting under thoſe afflictions, that they rejoiced and gloried in them. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, *Rom.* v. 2, 3. that in the midſt of their ſufferings, *they rejoiced in hope of the glory of God*; *and that they gloried in tribulations*, as being the way to be made partakers of that glory: And *Heb.* x. 34. That *they took joyfully the ſpoiling of their goods*; *knowing in themſelves*, *that they had in heaven a better and an enduring ſubſtance*. And for this reaſon, St. *James*, chap. i. 2. exhorts Chriſtians *to account it all joy*, *when they fall into divers temptations*; (that is various kinds of ſufferings) becauſe of the manifold advantages which from thence would redound to them.

Now what was it that inſpired them to all this courage and chearfulneſs, but the belief of a mighty reward, far beyond the proportion of all their ſufferings, and a firm perſuaſion that they ſhould be vaſt gainers by them at the laſt? This conſideration St. *Paul* urgeth with great force, 2 *Cor.* iv. 17, 18. *Our light affliction*, *which is but for a moment*, *worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*: *whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen*; *but at the things which are not ſeen*: *for the things which are ſeen*, *are temporal*; *but the things which are not ſeen*, *are eternal*. If we could compare things juſtly, and attentively regard and conſider *the inviſible* glories of another world, as well as *the things which are ſeen*; we ſhould eaſily perceive, that he who ſuffers for God and religion, does not *renounce* happineſs; but *puts it out to intereſt*, upon terms of the greateſt advantage.

I ſhall now ſpeak briefly to the

Second part of this remarkable *ſaying in the text*; *If we deny him*, *he alſo will deny us*: To which is ſubjoined in the words following, *if we believe not*; εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν, *if we deal unfaithfully with him*; *yet he abideth faithful*, *he cannot deny himſelf*; that is, he will be conſtant to his word, and make good *that ſolemn threatening* which he hath denounced againſt thoſe, who for fear of ſuffering ſhall deny him and his truth before men, *Matth.* x. 33. *Whoſoever* (ſaith our Lord there) *ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven.* Mark viii. 38. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* This is a terrible threatening, *to be diſowned by Chriſt at the day of judgment, in the preſence of God and his holy Angels*; and this threatening will certainly be made good; and though we may renounce him, *and break our faith with him, yet he remains faithful,* who hath threatened, and *cannot deny himſelf.*

This is matter of great terror, and ſeriouſly to be thought upon by thoſe who are tempted to deny Chriſt and his truth, either by the hope of worldly advantage, or the fear of temporal ſufferings. What worldly advantage can we propoſe to ourſelves, by quitting our religion, which can be thought an equal price, for the loſs of our immortal ſouls, and the happineſs of all eternity? Suppoſe the whole world were offered us in conſideration; yet *what is a man profited, if he ſhould gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* as our Saviour reaſons, *Matth.* xvi. 26.

And on the other hand, if the fear of temporal ſuffering be ſuch a terror to men, as to ſhake their conſtancy in religion, and to tempt them to renounce it; the fear of eternal torments ought to be much more powerful, to keep them ſtedfaſt to their religion, and to deter them from the denial of it. If fear will move us; then in all reaſon, that which is moſt terrible ought to prevail moſt with us, and the greateſt danger ſhould be moſt dreaded by us, according to our Saviour's moſt friendly and reaſonable advice, Luke xii. 4, 5. *I ſay unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you ſhall fear. Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to caſt into hell; yea, I ſay unto you, fear him.* If there can be no doubt which of them is moſt to be dreaded; there can be no doubt what we are to do, in caſe of ſuch a temptation.

I ſhall now draw ſome *inferences* from this diſcourſe by way of application.

Firſt, If *this be a faithful ſaying, that if we be dead with Chriſt, we ſhall alſo live with him; if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him; but if we deny him, he will alſo deny us*; the belief of it ought to have a mighty influence upon us, to make us ſtedfaſt and unmoveable in the profeſſion and practice of our holy religion. This inference the Apoſtle makes from the doctrine of a bleſſed reſurrection, 1 *Cor.* xv. 58. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; foraſmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.* If any thing will fix men in the profeſſion of their religion, and make them ſerious in the practice of it; the belief of a glorious reſurrection, and of the reward which God will then give to his faithful ſervants, muſt needs have a very powerful influence upon them to this purpoſe. Upon the ſame ground the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* exhorts them *to hold faſt the profeſſion of their faith, without wavering; becauſe he is faithful that hath promiſed.* If we be conſtant in *the profeſſion and practice* of our holy religion; God will be *faithful to the promiſe* which he hath made of *eternal life to thoſe who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory and honour and immortality.*

If under the dark and imperfect diſpenſation of *the law*, good men ſhewed ſo much courage and conſtancy for God and religion, as we read in that long catalogue of heroes, *Heb.* xi. how much more ſhould *Chriſtians*, whoſe faith is ſupported much more ſtrongly than *theirs* was, by a much clearer evidence of another life, and a bleſſed immortality, than *they* had; by more expreſs promiſes of divine comfort and aſſiſtance under ſufferings, than were made to *them*; and by the moſt divine and encouraging example, of the greateſt patience under the greateſt ſufferings, that the world ever had, in the death and paſſion of the Son of God, *who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the throne of God?* When we conſider this glorious example of ſuffering, and the glorious reward of it, how can we *be weary and faint in our minds!* If the ſaints and Apoſtles of the Old Teſtament did ſuch great things, by virtue of a faith, which relied chiefly upon the attributes and providence of God; what ſhould not *we* do, who have the ſecurity of God's expreſs promiſe for our comfort and encouragement! *We* certainly have much greater reaſon to take up our croſs more chearfully, and to bear it more patiently, than they did.

Secondly, We ſhould always be prepared in the reſolutions of our minds, to ſuffer for the teſtimony of God's truth and a good conſcience, if it ſhould pleaſe God at any time to call us to it. This our Saviour hath made a neceſſary condition of his religion, and a qualification of a true diſciple. *If any man will be my diſciple, let him take up his croſs and follow me.* So that we are to reckon upon it, and to prepare for it; that if it comes we may not be ſurpriſed, *as if ſome ſtrange thing had happened to us*; and may not be unreſolved what to do in ſuch a caſe. And God knows when we may be called to it: however it is wiſe, to forecaſt it in our minds, and to be always in a preparation and readineſs to entertain the worſt that may happen, that if it come, we may *be able to ſtand out in an evil day*; and if it does not come, God will accept the reſolution of our minds, and reward it according to the ſincerity of it: he that knows what we would have done, will conſider it, as if we had done it.

Thirdly, The leſs we are called *to ſuffer* for God, the more we ſhould think ourſelves obliged *to do* for him; the leſs God is pleaſed to exerciſe our *patience*, we ſhould abound ſo much the more in the *active virtues* of a good life; and our obedience to God ſhould be ſo much the more chearful, and we more *fruitful in every good work.* If there be no need of *ſealing* the truth with our *blood*, we ſhould be ſure to *adorn* and recommend it by our *lives*.

Fourthly and *laſtly*, If the hopes of immortality will bear men up under the extremity of ſuffering and torments, and give men courage and reſolution againſt all the *terrors* of the world: they ought much more to make us victorious over the *temptations* and *allurements* of it. For certainly it is in reaſon much eaſier *to forego pleaſure*, than *to endure pain*; *to refuſe or lay down a good place* for the teſtimony of a good conſcience, than *to lay down our lives* upon that account. And in vain does any man pretend that he will be a *martyr* for his religion, when he will not *rule an appetite*, nor *reſtrain a luſt*, nor *ſubdue a paſſion*, nor *croſs his covetouſneſs and ambition*, for the ſake of it, *and in hope of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lye, hath promiſed.* He that refuſeth to do *the leſs*, is not like to do *the greater*. It is very improbable, that a man will *die for his religion*, when he cannot be perſuaded *to live according to it*. So that by this we may try the ſincerity of our reſolution concerning *martyrdom*. For what profeſſion ſoever men make, he that will not *deny himſelf* the pleaſures of ſin, and the advantages of this world, for Chriſt; when it comes to the puſh, will never have the heart *to take up his croſs, and follow him*. He that cannot take up a reſolution *to live a ſaint*, hath a demonſtration within himſelf, that he is never like *to die a martyr*.

SERMON XXV.

Preach'd on All-Saints day.

The Bleſſedneſs of Good Men after Death.

REV. xiv. 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven, ſaying unto me, Write, Bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them.

I Will not trouble you with any nice diſpute about the author of this book of the *Revelation*, or the authority of it though both theſe were ſometime controverted; becauſe it is now many ages ſince this book was received into the *Canon* of the ſcriptures, as of *divine authority*, and as written by St. *John*. Nor ſhall I at this time enquire into the particular meaning of the ſeveral *viſions* and *predictions* contained in it. It is confeſſedly, in ſeveral parts of it, a very obſcure book: and there needs no other argument to ſatisfy us that it is ſo, than that ſo many learned and inquiſitive perſons, have given ſuch different interpretations of ſeveral remarkable paſſages in it; as particularly concerning *the ſlaying of the two witneſſes, and the number of the beaſt.*

The words which I have read to you, though there be ſome difficulty about the interpretation of ſome particular expreſſions in them; yet in the general ſenſe and intendment of them, they are very plain, being a ſolemn declaration of *the bleſſed ſtate of good men after this life.*

And that we may take the more notice of them, they are brought in with a great deal of ſolemn preparation and addreſs, as it were on purpoſe to beſpeak our attention to them: *I heard a voice from heaven, ſaying unto me, Write, bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth.* And for the greater confirmation of them, the ſpecial teſtimony of *the Spirit* is added to *the voice from heaven,* declaring the reaſon why they *that die in the Lord* are pronounced to be in ſo happy a condition: *Yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall *firſt* enquire into the particular ſenſe and meaning of them.

Secondly, Proſecute the general intendment of them, which I told you is to declare to us, *the bleſſed ſtate of thoſe that die in the Lord* (that is) of ſaints and good men, after they are departed this life.

Firſt, I ſhall enquire into the particular ſenſe and meaning of the words. To the clearing of which, nothing will conduce more, than to conſider the occaſion of them, which was briefly this. In the *viſions* of this and the foregoing chapter, is repreſented to St. *John,* the great ſtraits that the Chriſtians, the true worſhippers of the true God, ſhould be reduced to. On the one hand they are threatned with death; or if they be ſuffered to live, they are interdicted all commerce with human ſociety, chap. xiii. 15. *And he had power to cauſe, that as many as would not worſhip the image of the beaſt ſhould be killed:* And, ver. 17. *That no man may buy or ſell, ſave he that had the mark of the beaſt.* And on the other hand, they that do worſhip the beaſt are threatned with damnation, chap. xiv. 9, 10. *If any man do worſhip the beaſt, the ſame ſhall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, and ſhall be tormented with fire and brimſtone.* So that whenever this ſhould happen, it would be a time of great trial to the ſincere Chriſtians, being threatned with *extreme perſecution* on the one hand, and *eternal damnation* on the other; and therefore it is added in the 12th verſe, *here is the patience of the ſaints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jeſus.* This is repreſented in St. *John's viſions,* as the laſt and extremeſt perſecution of the true worſhippers of God, and which ſhould precede the final downfal of *Babylon.* And when this ſhould happen, then he tells us, *the patience of the ſaints* would be tried to purpoſe, and then it would be ſeen, who are *faithful* to God, and conſtant to his truth; and upon this immediately follows *the voice from heaven* in the *text*: *And I heard a voice from heaven, ſaying unto me, Write, bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

The main difficulty of the words, depends upon the word ἀπάρτι, *from henceforth;* which interpreters do variouſly refer to ſeveral parts of the *text.* Some by changing the accent, and reading it, ἀπαρτὶ, would change the ſignification of the word into *omninò; omninò beati ſunt, they are altogether bleſſed, very happy, who die in the Lord.* But this is altogether deſtitute of the countenance and warrant of any ancient copy. We will then ſuppoſe that the word is ἀπάρτι, and to be rendred as we tranſlate it, *from henceforth, from this time.* All the difficulty is, to what part of the *text* we are to refer it. Some refer it to the word *bleſſed; Bleſſed from henceforth are the dead which die in the Lord:* As if from this time, and not before, the ſouls of good men were, immediately after death, admitted into heaven, which many of the ancient fathers thought, the ſouls of good men who died before the coming of Chriſt, were not. But then this bleſſedneſs ought to have been dated, not from the time of St. *John's viſion,* but of Chriſt's aſcenſion; according to that of St. *Ambroſe*; in the hymn called *Te Deum*; *When thou hadſt overcome the ſharpneſs of death, thou didſt open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.*

Others refer it to *dying in the Lord. Bleſſed are the dead, that from henceforth die in the Lord.* But this hath no peculiar *emphaſis* in it; becauſe *they* were *bleſſed, that died in the Lord,* before that time.

Others refer it to the words following, concerning the teſtimony of the Spirit; *yea, from henceforth, ſaith the Spirit.* All theſe varieties agree in this ſenſe in general; that ſome ſpecial bleſſedneſs is promiſed and declared to thoſe who ſhould die after that time: but what that is in particular, is not eaſy to make out.

But the moſt plain and ſimple interpretation, and that which ſeems to be moſt ſuitable to the occaſion of theſe words, is this; that the word ἀπάρτι, *from henceforth*, is to be referred to the whole ſentence, thus; *from henceforth bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord*; as if St. *John* had ſaid, conſidering the extremity and cruel circumſtances of *this laſt and ſevere perſecution*, we may from that time forward reckon thoſe, who are already dead (ſuppoſing that *they died in the Lord*) to be very happy; in that they did not live to ſee and ſuffer thoſe things, which will then befal the faithful ſervants of God, when *the devil ſhall come, having great wrath, becauſe he knoweth he hath but a ſhort time.* Much in the ſame Senſe as *Solomon*, when *he conſider'd the oppreſſions that were done under the ſun*, ſays *Eccl.* iv. 2. that *he praiſed the dead, which were already dead; more than the living, which were yet alive*; that is, conſidering the oppreſſions which were ſo frequent in the world, he reckoned *thoſe* happier that were out of it, than *thoſe* who ſtill lived in it.

And as this is very agreeable to the ſcope of what goes before, ſo it ſuits very well with what follows after, as the reaſon, why thoſe perſons are declared to be ſo happy; *yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them*; that is, that they may be at an end of their troubles, and ſufferings; and may not be tried beyond their ſtrength and patience, under *that terrible perſecution* which will reign at that time; and likewiſe that they may receive the reward of all the good they have done, and the evils they have ſuffered in this world; in the very ſame ſenſe, that *the righteous* are ſaid to be *taken away from the evil to come*, Iſai. lvii. 1, 2. *The righteous is taken away from the evil to come, he ſhall enter into peace: they ſhall reſt in their beds, each one walking in his uprightneſs*; that is, enjoying the comfort of his integrity and ſincerity towards God.

And now the main difficulty being over, we ſhall need to trouble ourſelves the leſs about the other expreſſions in the *text*: Yet there are *two* which I ſhall a little explain to you.

1. What is here meant by *dying in the Lord*. And this ſort of phraſe, *in the Lord, in Chriſt, and in the name of Chriſt*, is uſed in ſcripture very variouſly. In general it ſignifies, *the doing or ſuffering any thing, with relation to Chriſt, and upon his account*; and ſo *to die in the Lord*, doth moſt frequently ſignify *to die in the faith of Chriſt, and the profeſſion of the chriſtian religion.* Sometimes it ſignifies *to die for his cauſe*, and *to bear teſtimony to his truth*, which is therefore called *martyrdom*, as St. *Paul* is ſaid to be δέσμιος, ἐν κυρίῳ, Eph. iv. 1. *a priſoner in the Lord*; that is, *for his cauſe.* So likewiſe, St. *Peter*; *if you be reproached* ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ, *in the name of Chriſt*; *happy are ye:* And 'tis probable, that the expreſſion, 1 *Cor.* xv. 18. *Then they alſo which are fallen aſleep in Chriſt*, is to be underſtood, of *thoſe that died for his cauſe*; becauſe it follows immediately, *if in this life only we have hope in Chriſt, we are of all men moſt miſerable*; that is, conſidering how much Chriſtians ſuffered for him in this life, they were in a moſt miſerable condition, if there were nothing to be expected beyond it; but eſpecially if we conſider the parallel phraſe, 1 Theſſ. iv. 14. *So them alſo that ſleep in Jeſus*, διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, *for Jeſus ſake*; that is, *them that have ſuffered martyrdom for him, will God bring with him.* And in this ſenſe, many underſtand the phraſe in the *text*, as ſpoken of *martyrs*, *bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord*; that is, *for his cauſe.* And tho' I think the phraſe may well enough be underſtood more generally, yet I ſhall not reject this ſenſe: becauſe it is not unſuitable to the ſcope and occaſion of the words. For conſidering *that laſt and extreme perſecution* which he had deſcribed; it was not altogether improper to pronounce thoſe happy, that had ſuffered martyrdom already, and were taken away from thoſe dreadful calamities, which in theſe laſt days of *Antichriſt* were to fall upon the faithful ſervants of Chriſt.

2. The other expreſſion is the laſt in the *text, and their works do follow them.* So we render the word ἀκολουθεῖ, which yet does moſt properly ſignify to *accompany*, or *go along with one*; and ſo indeed the expreſſion will rather be more emphatical, *they reſt from their labours, and their works accompany them.* But whether the word be render'd, *to follow*, or *to accompany*, the difference is not very material.

Thus you ſee what the particular ſenſe and meaning of the words probably is, *to declare the happy eſtate of thoſe ſaints and martyrs, who were already dead, in and for the faith of Chriſt; and ſhould not live to ſee thoſe cruel and fearful ſufferings, which ſhould afterwards come upon the Chriſtians.* But then this is grounded upon that general truth, that *they are happy that die in the Lord.* And this is that which I intend now to proſecute, abſtracting from the particular occaſion, upon which theſe words were ſpoken; which brings me to the

Second thing I propounded, and chiefly deſigned to handle upon the occaſion of *this day*; namely, *the happy eſtate of good men after they have departed out of this life.* And in ſpeaking to this, I ſhall confine myſelf to *two* particulars, which the *text* mentions, as the reaſons and grounds, why *they that die in the Lord*, are declared to be in ſo *bleſſed* a condition; *yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours, and their works do follow them.*

1. Good men, when they are departed this life, are freed from all the labours and pains they were exerciſed with in this world: *that they may reſt from their labours.*

2. They reap the comfort and reward of all the good which they have done in this world: *and their works do follow them*, or rather, *go along with them*, to receive the reward which God hath promiſed to *them, who by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory and honour and immortality.*

1. Thoſe *who die in the Lord*, are freed from the evils and miſeries of this life. And this is ſo great a felicity, that ſome (and thoſe who think themſelves no ſmall philoſophers) have placed the chief happineſs of man in freedom from pain and trouble. But tho' happineſs do not conſiſt in this alone; yet it cannot be denied to be a great part of it: For though ſome have been ſo phantaſtically obſtinate, as, againſt the reaſon and common ſenſe of mankind, to maintain this *Paradox*, that *a wiſe man may be as happy upon the rack, or in* Phalaris *his bull, as in the greateſt eaſe and freedom from pain that can be imagined*; yet nature cries ſhame of this hypocriſy; and there are none of thoſe *wiſe men* they ſpeak of, were ever *ſuch fools* as to try the experiment, and to ſhew by their actions, that it was indifferent to them, whether they laid themſelves down upon their beds every night, or were ſtretch'd upon a rack; which yet ought to have been indifferent to them, had they believed themſelves, and really eſteemed that, which others account *pain*, to be as happy a condition, as that which is commonly called *eaſe*.

But we need not trouble ourſelves to confute ſo ſtupid a principle, which is confuted by *nature*, and by every man's *ſenſe* and *experience*. I think we may take it for granted, that freedom from miſery is a very conſiderable part of happineſs; otherwiſe *heaven* and *hell*, if we conſider only the torment of it, would be all one. But certainly it is no ſmall endearment of religion, to the common ſenſe of mankind, that it promiſeth to us in the next life, a freedom from all the evils and troubles of this. And by *this* the happineſs of heaven is frequently deſcribed to us in ſcripture. *Iſai.* lvii. 2. ſpeaking of *the righteous man*; *he ſhall enter into peace*; *they ſhall reſt in their beds.* 2 *Theſſ.* i. 7. where the Apoſtle ſpeaking of the reward of thoſe, who ſhould ſuffer perſecution for religion, *it is a righteous thing with God* (ſays he) *to recompenſe to you, who are troubled, reſt with us, when the Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels.* And the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* frequently deſcribes the happineſs of Chriſtians by *entring into reſt.* And *Rev.* xxi. 4. the ſtate of the *new Jeruſalem* is ſet forth to us, by deliverance from thoſe troubles and ſorrows, which men are ſubject to in this world; *and God ſhall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there ſhall be no more death, neither ſorrow, nor crying, neither ſhall there be any more pain, for the former things are paſt away.*

Thus it is with us in this world, we are liable to *ſorrow* and *pain* and *death:* But when we are once got to heaven, none of *theſe* things ſhall approach us. *The former things are paſſed away*, that is, the evils we formerly endured, are paſt and over, and ſhall never return to afflict us any more.

And is not this a great comfort, when we are labouring under the evils of this life, and conflicting ſorely with the miſeries of it; that we ſhall one day be paſt all theſe, and find a ſafe refuge and retreat from all theſe ſtorms and tempeſts: When we are loaded with afflictions, and even tired with the burden of them, and ready to faint and ſink under it; to think that *there remains a reſt for us into which we ſhall* ſhortly *enter?* How can it chooſe but be a mighty conſolation to us, whilſt we are in this *vale of tears and troubles*, to be aſſured that the time is coming, when *God ſhall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there ſhall be no more ſorrow nor crying?*

There are none of us, but are obnoxious to any of the evils of this life; we feel ſome of them, and we fear more: our outward condition, it may be, is uncomfortable, we are poor and perſecuted; we are deſtitute of friends, or have many enemies; we are deſpoiled of many of thoſe comforts and enjoyments which we once had: our bodies perhaps are in pain, or our ſpirits troubled; or though we have no real cauſe of outward trouble, yet our ſouls are ill lodg'd, in the dark dungeon of a body; overpower'd with a melancholy humour, which keeps out all light and comfort from our minds.

And is it no reviving to us, to think of *that happy hour*, when we ſhall find a remedy and redreſs of all theſe evils at once; of *that bleſſed place*, where we ſhall take ſanctuary, from all thoſe afflictions and troubles which purſued us in this world; where ſorrow, and miſery, and death are perfect ſtrangers, and into which nothing that can render men in the leaſt unhappy, can ever enter? where our ſouls ſhall be in perfect reſt and contentment, and our bodies after a while ſhall be reſtored and reunited to our ſouls; not to cloud and clog them as they do here, but ſo happily changed, and refined to ſuch a perfection, that they ſhall be ſo far from giving any diſturbance to our minds, that they ſhall mightily add to their pleaſure and happineſs?

And when we are once landed in thoſe bleſſed regions, what a comfort will it be to us, to ſtand on the ſhore, and look back upon thoſe rough and dangerous ſeas, which we have eſcaped? How pleaſant to conſider the manifold evils and calamities which we are freed from, and for ever ſecured againſt? To remember our paſt labours and ſufferings, and to be able to defy all thoſe temptations, which were wont to aſſault us in this world, with ſo much violence, and with too much ſucceſs?

And this is the condition of the bleſſed ſpirits above. They find a perfect ceſſation of all afflictions and troubles, *they reſt from their labours*. But this is not all: For,

2. They are not only freed from all the evils and ſufferings they were exerciſed withal in this world; but they ſhall receive a plentiful reward of all the good they have done in it; *their works do accompany them*. When pious ſouls go out of this world, they do not only leave all the evils of the world behind them; but they carry along with them all the good they have done, to reap there the comfort and reward of it. Juſt as, on the other hand, wicked men when they die, leave all the good things of this world, all the pleaſures and enjoyments behind them; but the guilt and remorſe of their wicked lives accompany them, and ſtick cloſe to them, to torment them there, and that there they may be tormented for them.

Thus the ſcriptures repreſent to us the different condition of good and bad men, *Iſai.* iii. 10, 11. *Say ye to the righteous, that it ſhall be well with him: for they ſhall eat the fruit of their doings. Wo unto the wicked, it ſhall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands ſhall be given him.* Which is many times true in *this* world; but however that happen, will moſt certainly and remarkably be made good in *the other*. And this is moſt emphatically expreſt to us, in the parable of the *rich man* and *Lazarus*, *Luke* xvi. 25. where the *rich man* petitions *Abraham* for ſome eaſe, and *Abraham* returns him this anſwer; *Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedſt thy good things, and likewiſe* Lazarus *evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* What a change was here! how comfortable to the one, and how diſmal to the other! *Lazarus* found *reſt from all his labours* and ſufferings, and his piety and patience *accompanied him* into the other world, and conveyed him into *Abraham*'s boſom. Whereas *the rich man* was parted from all *his good things*, and the guilt of his ſins *went along with him*, and lodged him *in the place of torment*.

But my *text* confines me to the bright ſide of this proſpect; the conſideration of that glorious recompenſe which good men ſhall receive, for the good works which they have done in this world. Indeed the *text* doth not expreſly ſay, that *their works ſhall be rewarded*, but that *they ſhall go along with them*, and that they are *bleſſed* upon this account; and this implies *that they ſhall receive a ſure reward.* For as the Apoſtle reaſons, *God is not unrighteous to forget* our *work and labour of love. Verily there is a reward for the righteous*, as ſure as *there is a God that judgeth in the earth.*

But how great and glorious *that* ſhall be, I am not in any meaſure able to declare to you. It may ſuffice, that the ſcripture hath aſſured us in general, that *God* is the rewarder of good men, and that he will make them happy, not according to what can now enter into our narrow thoughts, but *according to the exceeding greatneſs of his power* and goodneſs. If we are to receive our reward from *God*, we need not doubt, but it will be very large, and ſuch as is every way worthy of *him* to beſtow. *For he is a great King*, and of great goodneſs; and we may ſafely refer ourſelves to him, in confidence that he will conſider us, not according to the meanneſs of our ſervice but according to the vaſtneſs of his treaſures, and the infinite bounty of his mind. If he hath promiſed to make us happy, though he hath not particularly declared to us, wherein this happineſs ſhall conſiſt; yet we may truſt *him that made us*, to find out ways *to make us happy*; and may believe, that he who made us *without* our knowledge or deſire, is able to make us happy *beyond* them both.

Only for the greater encouragement of our holineſs and obedience, though he hath promiſed to reward every good man, far beyond the proportion of any good he hath or can do; yet he hath declared, that theſe rewards ſhall be proportionably greater or leſs, according to the degree of every man's piety and virtue. So our Saviour tells us, that *they who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, great ſhall be their reward in heaven*, Matth. v. 12. That there will be a difference between the reward of *a righteous man*, and *a prophet*; that is, *of one who is more publickly and eminently uſeful for the ſalvation of others.* And among thoſe who are *teachers* of others, they that are moſt induſtrious, and conſequently more likely to be ſucceſsful in this work, ſhall have a more glorious reward; as we are told by the Angel, *Dan.* xii. 3. *And they that are wiſe*, (or as it is in the margin render'd, *they that be teachers) ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteouſneſs, as the ſtars for ever and ever.* So likewiſe we find in the parable of the *talents*, that he that improv'd his talent to *ten*, was made *ruler over ten cities*. And St. *Paul*, 2 *Cor.* ix. 6. ſpeaking of the degrees of mens charity and liberality towards the poor, ſays expreſly, *he that ſoweth ſparingly, ſhall reap ſparingly*; *but he that ſoweth bountifully, ſhall reap bountifully*; which by proportion of reaſon may be extended to the exerciſe of all other graces and virtues, 1 *Cor.* xv. 41, 42. The Apoſtle there repreſents the different degrees of glory, which good men ſhall be inveſted with at the reſurrection, by the different glory and ſplendor of the heavenly luminaries. *There is one glory of the ſun, another of the moon, and another glory of the ſtars*; *for one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory: So alſo is the reſurrection of the dead.* So that the more any man ſuffers for God, and the more patiently he ſuffers, the more holily and virtuouſly, the more charitably and uſefully he lives in *this world*; the more good works will accompany him into the *next*, and the greater and more glorious reward he may hope to receive there; which as the Apoſtle reaſons (in the concluſion of that chapter concerning the doctrine of the reſurrection) ought to be a mighty encouragement to every one of us, not only to be *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable* (that is, fix'd and reſolute in the profeſſion and practice of our religion) but *abounding* likewiſe *in the work of the Lord*; *foraſmuch as we know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

Every degree of diligence and induſtry, in the work and ſervice of God, will moſt certainly one day turn to a happy account. *Having therefore ſuch promiſes, dearly beloved, let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God.* The *more perfectly holy* we are here on earth, *the more perfectly happy* we ſhall be in heaven, and continue ſo to all eternity.

I have now done with the *two* reaſons, which are here given in the *text*, of the happineſs that good men, ſuch *as die in the Lord*, ſhall be made partakers of in another life; becauſe *they reſt from their labours, and their works accompany them*; they are freed from all the evils which they ſuffer'd, and ſhall receive the reward of all the good they have done in this life.

I ſhould now have proceeded to make ſome inferences from this diſcourſe; but thoſe I will reſerve for another diſcourſe on this ſubject.

All that I ſhall add at preſent, as the *application* of what I have already ſaid, is, that this ſhould ſtir us up to a careful and zealous imitation of thoſe *bleſſed* perſons deſcribed in the *text*, *who are dead in the Lord, and are at reſt from their labours, and whoſe works do accompany them.* Let us imitate them, in their faith and patience, in their piety and good works, and in their conſtancy to God and his truth, which was dearer to them than their lives.

Thus their virtues and ſufferings are deſcribed in the *viſions* of this book, chap. xiii. 10. *Here is the patience and the faith of the ſaints*; and chap. xiv. 12. *Here is the patience of the ſaints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jeſus*; and chap. xii. 11. *And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their teſtimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

In this way, and by theſe ſteps, all the *ſaints* and *martyrs* of all ages have aſcended up to heaven, and attained to that bleſſed ſtate, which they are now poſſeſſed of, after all the evils which they ſuffered in this world. *They are* now *at reſt from their labours*, and all the good *works* which they have done *are gone along with them*, and they are now, and ſhall for ever be, receiving the comfort and reward of them. And if we tread in their ſteps, by a zealous imitation of the piety and holineſs of their lives, and of the conſtancy and patience of their ſufferings; we ſhall one day be tranſlated into their bleſſed ſociety, and made partakers with them of the ſame glorious reward. If we *have our fruit unto holineſs*, our *end* ſhall be *everlaſting life*. If we *be faithful unto death*, we *ſhall receive a crown of life*.

Let us then, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* exhorts, chap. vi. 11, 12. *Every one of us ſhew the ſame diligence, to the full aſſurance of hope, unto the end: and let us not be ſlothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes.*

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great ſhepherd of the ſheep, through the blood of the everlaſting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, working in you that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight.

SERMON XXVI.

The ſecond Sermon on this text.

The Bleſſedneſs of Good Men, after Death.

Rev. xiv. 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven, ſaying unto me, Write, Bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do follow them.

IN my explication of theſe words I told you, that they are, in the general ſenſe and meaning of them, *a ſolemn declaration of the bleſſed eſtate of good men after this life*; but delivered upon a ſpecial occaſion, as is ſignified by that expreſſion, *from henceforth*; that is, *from the time of that viſion*, in which was repreſented to St. *John*, *the laſt and extremeſt perſecution* of the faithful ſervants of Chriſt, and which ſhould precede the fatal downfal of *Babylon*; *from that time*, *bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord*; that is, conſidering the extremity, and the cruel circumſtances of this *laſt and ſevereſt* perſecution, we may, *from that time forward*, reckon thoſe who are already dead (ſuppoſing that *they died in the Lord*) to be very happy; in that they do not live to ſee and ſuffer thoſe grievous things, which then will befall the faithful ſervants of God.

In my former diſcourſe, I conſidered the words according to the *general intention* of them, abſtracting from the *particular occaſion* upon which they were ſpoken, endeavouring to ſet forth *the happy eſtate of good men after this life*, from the *two* reaſons and grounds mentioned in the *text*, namely, becauſe *they reſt from their labours*, and becauſe *their works do follow*, or *accompany* and *go along with them*; which two particulars conſtitute the happineſs of the future ſtate.

That which farther remains, and to which I now proceed, is to make ſome *inferences* from what I have ſaid upon this ſubject. And in doing this, I ſhall have an eye on the *ſpecial occaſion* of the words, as well as on their *general intention*. And the *inferences* ſhall be theſe following:

Firſt, If thoſe that *die in the Lord* are *at reſt from their labours* and pains; then the *text* concludes directly againſt the feigned *purgatory* of the church of *Rome*, which ſuppoſeth a great number of thoſe that *die in the Lord*, and have *obtained eternal redemption* by him from hell, not to paſs immediately into happineſs; but to be detained in the ſuburbs of hell, in great pain and torment, till their ſouls be purged, and the debt of temporary puniſhment, to which they are liable, be ſome way or other paid off and diſcharged.

Secondly, Here is a mighty encouragement to piety and virtue, to conſider, that all the good we do in this world will *accompany* us into the other.

Thirdly, It is a great encouragement to patience under the ſufferings and perſecutions which attend good men in this world; that how heavy and grievous ſoever they are at preſent, they will end with this life, and we ſhall then *reſt from all our labours*.

Fourthly, The conſideration of *the* extreme ſufferings of Chriſtians in *the laſt times*, and which perhaps are not far from us, ſhould render us very indifferent to life, and all the enjoyments of it, ſo as even to eſteem it a particular grace and favour of God, to be *taken away from the evil to come*, and by death to prevent (if he ſees it good) *thoſe extremities* of ſufferings, which ſeem to be haſtening upon the world.

I. If thoſe *that die in the Lord are at reſt from all their labours* and pains; then this *text* concludes directly againſt the feigned *purgatory* of the church of *Rome*, which ſuppoſeth a great number, yea, the far greateſt part of thoſe *that die in the Lord*, and have *obtained eternal redemption* by him from hell, not to paſs immediately into happineſs, but to be detained ſomewhere (they are not certain where, but moſt probably in the ſuburbs of hell) in great pain and torment, equal in degree to that of hell, and differing only in duration; I ſay, to be detained there, till their ſouls be purged from the defilements they have contracted in this world, and the debt of temporary puniſhments, to which they are liable, be ſome way or other paid off and diſcharged.

They ſuppoſe indeed ſome very few holy men to be ſo perfect at their departure out of this life; that they do immediately, and without any ſtop, paſs into heaven becauſe they need no purgation; and thoſe likewiſe who ſuffer martyrdom, becauſe they diſcharge their debt of temporary puniſhments here: But the generality of Chriſtians *who die in the Lord*, they ſuppoſe ſo imperfect, as to ſtand in need of being *purged by fire*, and accordingly that they are detained a longer or ſhorter time, as their debt of temporary puniſhments is greater or leſs.

And indeed they have a very conſiderable and ſubſtantial reaſon, to exempt as few as poſſibly they can from going to *purgatory*; becauſe the more they put in fear of going thither, the market of *indulgences* riſeth the higher, and the profit thence accruing to the pope's coffers; and the more and greater legacies will be left to the prieſts, to hire their ſaying of *maſſes*, for the delivery of ſouls out of the place of torments: For though the prayers of *friends* and *relations* will contribute ſomething to this; yet nothing does the buſineſs ſo effectually, as the *maſſes* and prayers of *prieſts* to that end.

But how is it then that St. *John* ſays, that thoſe *that die in the Lord are happy*, becauſe *they reſt from their labours*; if ſo be the far greateſt part of thoſe *who die in the Lord* are ſo far from *reſting from their labours*, that they enter into far greater pains and torments, than ever they endured in this world? And therefore *Bellarmine*, that their doctrine of *purgatory* may receive no prejudice from this *text*, would have *from henceforth*, in the *text*, to be dated from *the day of judgment*; when he ſuppoſeth the pains of *purgatory* will be at an end. But why *from henceforth* ſhould take date from the *day of judgment*, he can give no reaſon, but only to ſave *purgatory* from being condemned by this *text*. For St. *John* plainly ſpeaks of the happineſs of thoſe that ſhould die *after that time* (whatever it be) which he there deſcribes; but *that time* cannot be *the day of judgment*, becauſe none ſhall die *after that time*. Juſt thus *Eſtius* (one of their moſt learned commentators) deals with another *text*, which by the generality of their writers is urged as a plain proof of *purgatory*; *he ſhall be ſaved*; *yet ſo as by fire*: Upon which he ſays, *It is ſufficient that there is nothing in this text againſt purgatory*. *Sufficient*, for what? Not to prove *purgatory*, as they generally pretend from this *text*, but to ſave it harmleſs from it; as if we had pretended that this *text* makes againſt it.

But there are others that make againſt it with a witneſs. Not only the perpetual ſilence of ſcripture about it, when there are ſo many fair occaſions of ſpeaking of it; as in the *parable* of the *rich man* and *Lazarus*, where the future ſtate is ſo particularly deſcribed, and yet no mention made, nor the leaſt intimation given of this *third* ſtate: But beſides the ſilence of ſcripture about it, there are ſeveral paſſages utterly inconſiſtent with it; as namely, St. *Paul*'s diſcourſe in the beginning of the *fifth* chapter of the *ſecond* epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, where he plainly declares the aſſurance he had, that all ſincere Chriſtians, ſo ſoon as they quit the body, do paſs into happineſs: *For we know* (ſays he) *that if our earthly houſe of this tabernacle were diſſolved*; *we have a building of God, a houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. The plain meaning of which is, that ſo ſoon as we quit the one, we ſhall paſs into the other. And this conſideration, he tells us, made Chriſtians weary of this world, and willing to die; ver. 2. *For in this we groan earneſtly, deſiring to be clothed upon with our houſe, which is from heaven*; and ver. 4. *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.* But had Chriſtians believed, that the greateſt part of them, when they left the body, were to go into *purgatory*, to be terribly tormented there; they would not have been in ſuch haſte to die; but would have protracted the time as long as they could, and have contentedly born *the burden of this earthly tabernacle*, rather than to quit it, for a condition a thouſand times more intolerable. But St. *Paul* expreſly ſays, that Chriſtians *knew* the contrary; and that as ſoon as ever they went *out of the body* they ſhould be happy, and *with the Lord*; and that this gave them courage againſt the fears of death; ver. 6. *Therefore we are always confident*, θαῤῥοῦντες οὖν πάντοτε, *bono igitur animo ſumus*; *Therefore we are always of good courage, knowing that whilſt we are at home in the body, we are abſent from the Lord*; and ver. 8. *We are of good courage, I ſay, and willing rather to be abſent from the body, and preſent with the Lord.* The plain ſenſe of which is, that Chriſtians were willing rather to die than to live; becauſe they knew, that ſo ſoon as they *left the body* and departed this life, they ſhould *be preſent with the Lord.* But now if the doctrine of *purgatory* be true, this whole reaſoning of St. *Paul* proceeds upon a groſs miſtake; and therefore I am certain it is not true: And ſo does *the voice from heaven* here in the *text*; *bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord, that they may reſt from their labours*: For there is no reaſon to reſtrain this general expreſſion, *that die in the Lord*, only to *the martyrs*; for though they are certainly included, and perhaps primarily intended in it; yet this phraſe comprehends all thoſe *who die in the faith of Chriſt*, and is moſt frequently ſo uſed in the New Teſtament.

But let this ſuffice to have been ſpoken of this matter; eſpecially ſince biſhop *Fiſher* and ſeveral of their own learned writers, do ſo frankly acknowledge, that their doctrine of *purgatory* hath no ſufficient ground in ſcripture. *Other reaſons* I grant they have for it, which make them very loth to quit it; it is a very *profitable* doctrine, and therefore they have taken care to have it more abundantly confirmed, by apparitions of ſouls from the dead, than any other doctrine whatſoever. In ſhort, how little ſoever they can ſay for it, it is in vain to go about to perſuade them to part with it. *Demetrius the ſilverſmith* argued as well as he could for his *goddeſs Diana*, from *the univerſal conſent* of the world in the worſhip of her; *the great goddeſs Diana, whom all Aſia, and the world worſhippeth.* But his truſty argument to his workmen was, *Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth, and this our craft is in danger to be ſet at nought.*

II. Here is a mighty encouragement to piety and virtue, to conſider that all the good we do in this world will *accompany us* into the other. *Bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord; for their works accompany them.*

When we come to die, we can call nothing our own but the good works which by the grace of God we have been enabled to do in this life. Theſe will ſtick by us, and bear us company into the other world, when we ſhall be ſtript of all other things, and forced to part from them, whether we will or no. Our riches and our honours, our ſenſual pleaſures and delights will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay, many times they do not accompany us ſo far as the grave, but leave us very unkindly and unſeaſonably, when we have the greateſt need and uſe of them.

There is one way indeed, whereby we may ſecure our riches, and make ſure friends to ourſelves of them, by laying them out in charity. By this means we may ſend them before us, and conſign them over to another world, to make way for our reception there. So our Lord aſſures us, *Luke* xii. 33. that *by giving alms we provide ourſelves bags which wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens which faileth not*; and *Luke* xvi. 9. that by this way we may *make to ourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs; that when we fail, they may receive us into everlaſting habitations. The mammon of unrighteouſneſs*, What is that? It is what the ſcripture elſewhere calls *deceitful riches*; becauſe in other ways, in which men commonly lay them out, they turn to no certain account, but one way or other do deceive and fruſtrate our expectation: but by diſpoſing of them in charity, to the relief of the poor and perſecuted, we *make* ſure *friends* of them, and conſign the effects of them to our certain benefit and advantage in another world.

And as charity, ſo likewiſe all other graces and virtues are *that good part which cannot be taken away from us*. All the good actions that we do in this life, will go with us to the grave, and bear us company into the other world, and will ſtand by us, when we come to appear before our Judge, and thro' the merits of our bleſſed Saviour will procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a moſt ample and eternal reward.

And what an encouragement is this to holineſs and virtue, to conſider that it will be all our own another day, and turn to our unſpeakable advantage at our great account! To be aſſured, that whoever ſerves God faithfully, lays up ſo much treaſure for himſelf, which he may take along with him into the other world; and does provide for himſelf laſting comforts and faithful companions, which will never leave him nor forſake him; a happineſs large as his deſires, and durable and immortal as his ſoul!

Let us then *do all the good* that poſſibly we can, *whilſt we have opportunity*: Let us ſerve God induſtriouſly, and with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do ſhall be loſt and fall to the ground, that no grace and virtue that we practiſe in this life, nor any degree of them, ſhall loſe their reward. If we faithfully improve the talents which are committed to us, to our maſter's advantage; when he comes to call us to an account, and finds that we have done ſo, we ſhall not fail to receive both his approbation and reward. And what a comfort will it be to any one of us, to hear thoſe bleſſed words from the mouth of our Lord; *well done thou good and faithful ſervant, thou haſt been faithful in a little, I will make thee ruler over much; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* We ſhall not need to plead our ſervices to him, and put him in mind of them: Our Judge himſelf will celebrate our good deeds upon the theatre of the world, and commemorate them to our advantage; and interpret every good office we have done, to any of his poor and afflicted members, as if it had been a kindneſs immediately done to himſelf. So our Lord repreſents the proceedings of the great Judge and King of the world, in the great day of recompenſe, *Matth.* xxv. 34. *Then ſhall the king ſay unto them on his right hand, come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink: I was a ſtranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto me. Then ſhall the righteous anſwer him, ſaying, Lord when ſaw we thee* in any of theſe circumſtances; *hungry, or thirſty, or a ſtranger, or naked, or ſick, or in priſon, and miniſtred unto thee? And the king ſhall anſwer and ſay unto them, verily I ſay unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Who would not be ambitious and glad to ſerve ſuch a prince, who will ſo benignly interpret, and ſo bountifully reward the leaſt ſervice we do to him!

III. The conſideration of this ſhould likewiſe be a great argument and ſupport to our patience, under all thoſe evils, and ſufferings, and perſecutions, which many times attend good men in this world. They are for the preſent perhaps very heavy and grievous: but there is a time ſhortly coming, when we ſhall be at eaſe, and perfectly freed from them; when we ſhall find *reſt from our labours* and ſufferings; when we ſhall *enter into peace, and reſt in our beds, every one walking in his uprightneſs*; that is, reaping the comfort and enjoying the reward of his ſincerity towards God, and conſtant ſuffering for his cauſe and truth. And therefore it was well ſaid of a good man, *bleſſed be God that we are to die*; becauſe to good men, *that* is a certain remedy of all the evils of this life, and will unqueſtionably put an end to them. The grave is a place of reſt, and diſcharge from all trouble, as *Job* elegantly deſcribes it, chap. iii. 17, 18, 19. *There the wicked ceaſe from troubling: there the weary be at reſt. There the priſoners reſt together, they hear not the voice of the oppreſſor. The ſmall and the great are there, and the ſervant is free from his maſter.*

So ſoon as we enter into the other world, we are ſecure againſt the purſuit and danger of all thoſe evils which afflicted us in this world; and nothing will remain but the joyful remembrance of our ſufferings, and the plentiful reward of our conſtancy and patience under them. And the more our tribulations and perſecutions have abounded, the greater will our comfort and happineſs then be, *which* (ſaith St. *Paul*) *is a manifeſt token*, a clear demonſtration, *of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be accounted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye alſo ſuffer; ſeeing it is a righteous thing with God, to recompenſe to you who are troubled, reſt with us, when the Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels*, 2 Theſſ. i. 5, 6, 7.

IV. The conſideration of the extreme ſufferings, which are to fall upon the faithful ſervants of Chriſt in *the laſt times*, and which ſeem now to be begun in the world, ſhould make us very contented to leave this world, and glad of any fair opportunity and excuſe, to take our leave of it, and to be out of the reach and danger of thoſe violent and *more than human temptations*, with which our faith and conſtancy may be aſſailed; nay, to eſteem it a particular grace and favour of God to us, to be *taken away from the evil to come*, and to prevent (if God ſees it good) thoſe extremities of ſufferings which are coming upon the world.

Theſe ſeem now to be begun in ſome part of it: *They* in our neighbour nation have a *bitter cup* put into their hands; *a cup of aſtoniſhment* to all thoſe that hear of it. Whether this be *that laſt and extreme perſecution* ſpoken of here by St. *John*, I ſhall not pretend poſitively to determine. It is plainly diſtinguiſh'd in the *viſions*, from *that* under *the firſt beaſt*, deſcribed *Rev.* xiii. from verſe the firſt to ver. 11. and chap. xvii. there is a deſcription of *the beaſt upon which the woman ſitteth, on whoſe forehead is a name written*, **Myſtery, Babylon the Great:** And *this beaſt* is there ſaid to *have ſeven heads and ten horns*, which are thus explain'd by St. *John*, chap. xvii. 9, 10. *And here is the mind which hath wiſdom; the ſeven heads are ſeven mountains upon which the woman ſitteth; and there are ſeven kings*, that is (as is generally agreed by interpreters) a ſucceſſion of ſeven governments: And ver. 12, 13, 14. *And the ten horns which thou ſaweſt are ten kings which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beaſt. Theſe have one mind, and ſhall give their power and ſtrength unto the beaſt; and ſhall make war with the lamb.* And ver. 18. *And the woman which thou ſaweſt, is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

So that *this beaſt* is plainly *the Roman empire*; and *the woman that ſitteth upon her*, is the *great city* ſtanding upon *ſeven mountains, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*; which can be no other than *Rome*, as is agreed by interpreters on all ſides. *Bellarmine* (*l.* 2. *c.* 2. *de Rom. Pontif.*) confeſſeth that St. *John* in the *Revelation* every where calleth *Rome*, *Babylon*, as *Tertullian* (ſaith he) hath noted, and as is plain from chap. xvii. where *Babylon* is ſaid to *be ſeated on ſeven mountains*, and *to have dominion over the kings of the earth:* There being no other city than *Rome*, which in the time of St. *John had dominion over the kings of the earth*; and that *Rome* was built upon *ſeven hills* is famous. Thus much *Bellarmine* acknowledgeth, conſtrained by the force of truth; and for another ſmall reaſon; namely, becauſe St. *Peter* writes his firſt epiſtle from *Babylon*, by which if *Rome* be not meant, they have no proof from ſcripture, that St. *Peter* was ever there.

Indeed they of the church of *Rome* would have it to be only *Rome Pagan*. But that cannot be; becauſe *this beaſt*, after *his laſt head was wounded to death*, and *his deadly wound was healed*, *had power given him to continue two and forty months*, or (as it is elſewhere expreſs'd) *twelve hundred ſixty days*; that is in the prophetick ſtyle, ſo many years; and likewiſe becauſe it was not to begin till *the ten kingdoms*, into which the *Roman* empire upon its diſſolution was divided, were ſet up; which was not till after the *weſtern* empire was overthrown and deſtroyed by the *Goths* and *Vandals*. And laſtly, becauſe this is that *Rome* or *Babylon*, which ſhould finally *be deſtroyed*, and *caſt as a milſtone into the bottom of the ſea*, never to riſe again; which is yet to come. And of *this beaſt* it is ſaid, that he ſhould *make war with the ſaints, and overcome them*, chap. xiii. ver. 7. that is, that he ſhould raiſe a long and great perſecution againſt them which ſhould try their faith and patience; ver. 10. *Here is the patience, and the faith of the ſaints. The beaſt* then *with ten horns* muſt be *Rome*, governing the *ten kingdoms*, into which the *Roman* empire was broken; and this can be nothing elſe but *Rome Papal*, to which *the ten kings* are ſaid *to give their power*, and to which they were in a moſt ſervile manner ſubject for ſeveral ages, as is plain from hiſtory.

And to confirm this, it is very obſervable, that the ancient fathers generally agree that *that which hindered the revealing of the wicked one* (ſpoken of by St. *Paul* 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 7, 8.) was *the Roman empire*; and *that* being removed, *the man of ſin* or *Antichriſt* was to ſucceed in its room. I ſhall produce a few teſtimonies to this purpoſe, but very remarkable ones. *Tertullian* expounding what St. *Paul* means by *him that withholdeth or letteth*, hath theſe words, *Quis niſi Romanus ſtatus*, &c. *Who is that but the Roman ſtate, which being broken into ten kings, ſhall bring on Antichriſt?* And then *the wicked one ſhall be revealed*. And in his *Apology* he gives this

And as charity, ſo likewiſe all other graces and virtues are *that good part which cannot be taken away from us.* All the good actions that we do in this life, will go with us to the grave, and bear us company into the other world, and will ſtand by us, when we come to appear before our Judge, and thro' the merits of our bleſſed Saviour will procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a moſt ample and eternal reward.

And what an encouragement is this to holineſs and virtue, to conſider that it will be all our own another day, and turn to our unſpeakable advantage at our great account! To be aſſured, that whoever ſerves God faithfully, lays up ſo much treaſure for himſelf, which he may take along with him into the other world; and does provide for himſelf laſting comforts and faithful companions, which will never leave him nor forſake him; a happineſs large as his deſires, and durable and immortal as his ſoul!

Let us then *do all the good* that poſſibly we can, *whilſt we have opportunity:* Let us ſerve God induſtriouſly, and with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do ſhall be loſt and fall to the ground, that no grace and virtue that we practiſe in this life, nor any degree of them, ſhall loſe their reward. If we faithfully improve the talents which are committed to us, to our maſter's advantage; when he comes to call us to an account, and finds that we have done ſo, we ſhall not fail to receive both his approbation and reward. And what a comfort will it be to any one of us, to hear thoſe bleſſed words from the mouth of our Lord; *well done thou good and faithful ſervant, thou haſt been faithful in a little, I will make thee ruler over much; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* We ſhall not need to plead our ſervices to him, and put him in mind of them: Our Judge himſelf will celebrate our good deeds upon the theatre of the world, and commemorate them to our advantage; and interpret every good office we have done, to any of his poor and afflicted members, as if it had been a kindneſs immediately done to himſelf. So our Lord repreſents the proceedings of the great Judge and King of the world, in the great day of recompenſe, *Matth.* xxv. 34. *Then ſhall the king ſay unto them on his right hand, come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink: I was a ſtranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto me. Then ſhall the righteous anſwer him, ſaying, Lord when ſaw we thee* in any of theſe circumſtances; *hungry, or thirſty, or a ſtranger, or naked, or ſick, or in priſon, and miniſtred unto thee? And the king ſhall anſwer and ſay unto them, verily I ſay unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Who would not be ambitious and glad to ſerve ſuch a prince, who will ſo benignly interpret, and ſo bountifully reward the leaſt ſervice we do to him!

III. The conſideration of this ſhould likewiſe be a great argument and ſupport to our patience, under all thoſe evils, and ſufferings, and perſecutions, which many times attend good men in this world. They are for the preſent perhaps very heavy and grievous: but there is a time ſhortly coming, when we ſhall be at eaſe, and perfectly freed from them; when we ſhall find *reſt from our labours* and ſufferings; when we ſhall *enter into peace, and reſt in our beds, every one walking in his uprightneſs*; that is, reaping the comfort and enjoying the reward of his ſincerity towards God, and conſtant ſuffering for his cauſe and truth. And therefore it was well ſaid of a good man, *bleſſed be God that we are to die*; becauſe to good men, *that* is a certain remedy of all the evils of this life, and will unqueſtionably put an end to them. The grave is a place of reſt, and diſcharge from all trouble, as *Job* elegantly deſcribes it, chap. iii. 17, 18, 19. *There the wicked ceaſe from troubling: there the weary be at reſt. There the priſoners reſt together, they hear not the voice of the oppreſſor. The ſmall and the great are there, and the ſervant is free from his maſter.*

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Theſe ſeem now to be begun in ſome part of it: *They* in our neighbour nation have a *bitter cup* put into their hands; *a cup of aſtoniſhment* to all thoſe that hear of it. Whether this be *that laſt and extreme perſecution* ſpoken of here by St. *John*, I ſhall not pretend poſitively to determine. It is plainly diſtinguiſh'd in the *viſions*, from *that* under *the firſt beaſt*, deſcribed *Rev.* xiii. from verſe the firſt to ver. 11. and chap. xvii. there is a deſcription of *the beaſt upon which the woman ſitteth, on whoſe forehead is a name written*, **Myſtery, Babylon the Great:** And *this beaſt* is there ſaid to *have ſeven heads and ten horns*, which are thus explain'd by St. *John*, chap. xvii. 9, 10. *And here is the mind which hath wiſdom; the ſeven heads are ſeven mountains upon which the woman ſitteth; and there are ſeven kings*, that is (as is generally agreed by interpreters) a ſucceſſion of ſeven governments: And ver. 12, 13, 14. *And the ten horns which thou ſaweſt are ten kings which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beaſt. Theſe have one mind, and ſhall give their power and ſtrength unto the beaſt; and ſhall make war with the lamb.* And ver. 18. *And the woman which thou ſaweſt, is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

So that *this beaſt* is plainly *the Roman empire*; and *the woman that ſitteth upon her*, is the *great city* ſtanding upon *ſeven mountains, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*; which can be no other than *Rome*, as is agreed by interpreters on all ſides. *Bellarmine* (*l.* 2. *c.* 2. *de Rom. Pontif.*) confeſſeth that St. *John* in the *Revelation* every where calleth *Rome*, *Babylon*, as *Tertullian* (ſaith he) hath noted, and as is plain from chap. xvii. where *Babylon* is ſaid to *be ſeated on ſeven mountains*, and *to have dominion over the kings of the earth*: There being no other city than *Rome*, which in the time of St. *John had dominion over the kings of the earth*; and that *Rome* was built upon *ſeven hills* is famous. Thus much *Bellarmine* acknowledgeth, conſtrained by the force of truth; and for another ſmall reaſon; namely, becauſe St. *Peter* writes his firſt epiſtle from *Babylon*, by which if *Rome* be not meant, they have no proof from ſcripture, that St. *Peter* was ever there.

Indeed they of the church of *Rome* would have it to be only *Rome Pagan*. But that cannot be; becauſe *this beaſt*, after *his laſt head was wounded to death*, and *his deadly wound was healed, had power given him to continue two and forty months*, or (as it is elſewhere expreſs'd) *twelve hundred ſixty days*; that is in the prophetick ſtyle, ſo many years; and likewiſe becauſe it was not to begin till *the ten kingdoms*, into which the *Roman* empire upon its diſſolution was divided, were ſet up; which was not till after the *weſtern* empire was overthrown and deſtroyed by the *Goths* and *Vandals*. And laſtly, becauſe this is that *Rome* or *Babylon*, which ſhould finally *be deſtroyed*, and *caſt as a milſtone into the bottom of the ſea*, never to riſe again; which is yet to come. And of *this beaſt* it is ſaid, that he ſhould *make war with the ſaints, and overcome them*, chap. xiii. ver. 7. that is, that he ſhould raiſe a long and great perſecution againſt them which ſhould try their faith and patience; ver. 10. *Here is the patience, and the faith of the ſaints. The beaſt* then *with ten horns* muſt be *Rome*, governing the *ten kingdoms*, into which the *Roman* empire was broken; and this can be nothing elſe but *Rome Papal*, to which *the ten kings* are ſaid *to give their power*, and to which they were in a moſt ſervile manner ſubject for ſeveral ages, as is plain from hiſtory.

And to confirm this, it is very obſervable, that the ancient fathers generally agree that *that which hindered the revealing of the wicked one* (ſpoken of by St. *Paul* 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 7, 8.) was *the Roman empire*; and *that* being removed, *the man of ſin* or *Antichriſt* was to ſucceed in its room. I ſhall produce a few teſtimonies to this purpoſe, but very remarkable ones. *Tertullian* expounding what St. *Paul* means by *him that withholdeth or letteth*, hath theſe words, *Quis niſi Romanus ſtatus*, &c. *Who is that but the Roman ſtate, which being broken into ten kings, ſhall bring on Antichriſt?* And then *the wicked one ſhall be revealed*. And in his *Apology* he gives this reaſon, why the Chriſtians ſhould pray for the *Roman* emperors, and the whole ſtate of the empire; *becauſe the greateſt miſchief hanging over the world, is binder'd by the continuance of it.* St. *Chryſoſtom* ſpeaking of *that which hinders the revelation of the man of ſin; this* (ſays he) *can be no other than the Roman empire: for as long as that ſtands, he dares not ſhew himſelf; but upon the vacancy or ceaſing of that, he ſhall aſſume to himſelf both the power of God and man.* St. *Auſtin* in his book *de civit.* Dei, *no man* (ſays he) *doubts, but that the ſucceſſor of the Roman emperor in* Rome *ſhall be the man of ſin;* and we know who hath ſucceeded him.

But now after this, *another beaſt* is repreſented *coming out of the earth*; not ſucceeding in the place of the *firſt beaſt*, but appearing during his continuance, ver. 12. and he hath theſe remarkable characters, by which he may be known.

1. He is ſaid to have *but two horns*; by which, according to the interpretation of the *ten horns*, ſignifying *the ten kingdoms*, into which the *Roman* empire after its diſſolution ſhould be divided, we are in all reaſon to underſtand *two of theſe kingdoms*, of which *this beaſt*, whoever he be, ſhall be poſſeſſed.

2. He is ſaid to *be like a Lamb*, but *to ſpeak like a Dragon*; that is, to pretend and make a ſhew of great lenity and mildneſs, in his proceedings; but that really he ſhall be very cruel. It ſhall be pretended that he does all without violence, and without arms; but he ſhall *ſpeak as a Dragon*, that is, in truth ſhall exerciſe great force and cruelty; either alluding to the cruelty of *the dragon*, literally ſo called; or perhaps prophetically pointing at *a particular ſort of armed ſoldiers*, called by that name of *dragons*, or, as we according to the *French* pronunciation call them, *dragoons*.

3. He ſhall ariſe during the continuance of *the firſt beaſt*, and engage in his cauſe; but *the firſt beaſt* ſhall only ſtand by and look on, ver. 12. *and he exerciſeth all the power of the firſt beaſt, before him, and cauſeth the earth and them that dwell therein, to worſhip the beaſt, whoſe deadly wound was healed*; plainly declaring, that *this perſecution* ſhould not immediately ariſe from the *firſt beaſt*, which is ſaid *to come out of the ſea*, which in this prophecy denotes *the ſtate eccleſiaſtical*; but from *the ſecond beaſt*, which *comes out of the earth*, and denotes *the temporal power*. But yet all this ought to be acted in the ſight of *the firſt beaſt*, and in his behalf to *compel men to worſhip him*.

4. That he ſhall be remarkable for cauſing fire to come down from heaven to earth, in a wonderful manner, to the great terror and amazement of men; ver 13. *And he doth great wonders; ſo that he maketh fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the ſight of men.*

5. That he ſhould interdict all thoſe, who would not worſhip *the beaſt*, all commerce with human ſociety, the exerciſe of civil trades and profeſſions; ver. 17. *And he cauſeth; that no man might buy or ſell, ſave he that had the mark of the beaſt.*

6. And *laſtly*, (which ſeems to be the moſt peculiar and characteriſtical note of all the reſt) that his number ſhould be 666, that is, (as moſt of the ancients underſtand it) that the *numeral letters* of a certain *word* or *name* ſhould, being computed, amount to *that number*. And it is expreſly ſaid to be the *number of a man*. Ver. 18. *Let him that hath underſtanding count the number of the beaſt; for it is the number of a man.* And in the verſe before, it is ſaid to be *the number of his name*.

Now to whom all theſe characters do agree, and eſpecially the laſt, concerning *the number of his name*, I ſhall not preſume to conjecture; much leſs poſitively to determine, whether he be now in being; becauſe it is ſaid to require a particular wiſdom and underſtanding to find it out. *Here is wiſdom; let him that hath underſtanding count the number of the beaſt.* However the event, when the thing is fully accompliſh'd, will clearly diſcover it. Thus much is certain, that *this extreme perſecution*, whenever it ſhall be, will forerun the final deſtruction of *Babylon*, which will not then be far off. And concerning *this* it is, that St. *John* ſpeaks, chap. xiv. 12. when he ſays, *here is the patience of the Saints, here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jeſus.* And then he immediately adds, as it is in the *text, and I heard a voice from heaven, ſaying unto me, Write, bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, ſaith the Spirit, that they may reſt from their labours; and their works do accompany them.* Thus much may ſuffice to have been ſpoken on this *text*.

SERMON XXVII.

Preach'd on All-Saints-day.

The Vanity and Wickedneſs of Honouring dead Saints, and Perſecuting the Living.

LUKE xi. 49, 50, 51.

Therefore alſo ſaid the Wiſdom of God, I will ſend them prophets and Apoſtles, and ſome of them they ſhall ſlay and perſecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was ſhed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which periſhed between the altar and the temple: verily I ſay unto you, it ſhall be required of this generation.

THE latter part of this chapter is a very ſharp, but juſt *invective*, made by our Saviour againſt the hypocriſy of the *ſcribes and phariſees*, of which he gives many inſtances; and this among the reſt for one, that they pretended a great honour and reſpect for the righteous men, and prophets of former ages, whom their fathers had perſecuted and ſlain; but yet were of the very ſame ſpirit and temper, and as ready to perſecute good men, as their fathers were. They raiſed indeed ſtately monuments to the memory of thoſe ſaints and martyrs, and adorned them with great art and coſt, and it is likely made a great ſhew of eſteem and veneration for them: but all this while they were of the ſame diſpoſition with their fathers, and bare the ſame implacable hatred and malice againſt the prophets and righteous men who then lived among them, (yea againſt *that great prophet*, whom God had ſent into the world, *Jeſus the Son of God*) which their fathers did againſt the good men of *their* times. And tho' they diſclaimed the wickedneſs and cruelty of their fathers, with never ſo much zeal and vehemency; yet for all that, they were ready to do the ſame things. Now this was ſo groſs and odious a piece of hypocriſy in them, that our Saviour doth with great reaſon denounce ſo ſevere a wo againſt them: *wo unto you; for ye build the ſepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witneſs, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their ſepulchres.* And then it follows; *therefore alſo ſaid the wiſdom of God, I will ſend them prophets and Apoſtles, and ſome of them they ſhall ſlay and perſecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was ſhed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, to the blood of Zacharias, which periſhed between the altar and the temple.*

There are conſiderable difficulties in both theſe paſſages. As to the former, *wo unto you, for ye build the ſepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witneſs, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their ſepulchres.* The force of this reaſoning, is at firſt ſight not eaſy to be diſcerned; and therefore expoſitors have gone ſeveral ways to explain it.

Some comparing this with the parallel place in St. *Matthew*'s Goſpel (chap. xxiii. 29.) will not have our Saviour to mean, that by *building the ſepulchres of the prophets* they expreſs'd *their approbation of their fathers killing them*. They did indeed teſtify by their uſage of *the righteous men* that liv'd amongſt themſelves, that they were of the very ſame temper and ſpirit, which their fathers had been of; and that they would have done juſt as their fathers did, if they had been in the ſame circumſtances with their fathers; ſo that *they were witneſſes to themſelves* (as it is in St. *Matthew*) *that they were children of them which killed the prophets*; they owned themſelves *their children* by *deſcent*, and their actions *witneſſed* that they were *their children* alſo in *reſemblance*; nay, (as it is there farther intimated) they ſeem'd reſolv'd *to fill up the meaſure of their fathers*: tho' all this while they pretended not to approve their fathers behaviour; and therefore whilſt they were *building the tombs of the prophets, and garniſhing the ſepulchres of the righteous, they ſaid, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.* And the interpreters that go this way do accordingly render theſe words of St. *Luke*; not as they are in our tranſlation, *ye bear witneſs, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers*; but, *ye bear witneſs, and ye allow* (or, *are well pleaſed with*) *the deeds of your fathers*; that is, ye own that they were your fathers, who did theſe things; and tho' you do not *in words allow* what they did, yet your *inward tempers and diſpoſitions* (whether you know it or no) are the very ſame with theirs, which you too plainly *teſtify* by your *actions*; ſo that when *you build the ſepulchres of the prophets*, you only expoſe the deceitfulneſs and hypocriſy of your hearts, your *pretenſes* and your *actions* directly contradicting each other. Thus ſome expoſitors give the ſenſe of this paſſage.

But others think, that our Saviour intended ſomewhat more, in St. *Luke*, namely to retort upon them the honour which they ſeemed to do to the prophets, *in building their ſepulchres* as an *argument that they rejoiced in their death*; ſeeing they were ſo well content to be at the charge of a monument for them; like *Herod* who when he had murdered *Ariſtobulus*, made a magnificent funeral for him; or as the *Roman* hiſtorians ſay of *Caracalla*, tho' he hated all good Men, whilſt they were alive, yet he would pretend to honour them, when they were dead. This ſome think our Saviour intended in theſe words, *truly ye bear witneſs, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their ſepulchres*; as if he had ſaid, hereby ye teſtify, that ye allow and like very well what your fathers did to the Prophets. According to which latter expoſition, there ſeems to be more force and greater ſharpneſs in our Saviour's reproof; as not only charging them with the ill uſage of the righteous men of their own times; but moreover making them, by *their building the tombs, and garniſhing the ſepulchres* of the ancient prophets, to become as it were acceſſaries to the murder of them.

But leaving this digreſſion, I now proceed to that which I primarily intended; namely, *Firſt*, to explain the following words, which I have choſen as my preſent ſubject, and *then* to make ſome *obſervations* upon them.

Therefore alſo ſaid the wiſdom of God, I will ſend them prophets and Apoſtles, and ſome of them they ſhall ſlay and perſecute; that the blood of all the prophets which was ſhed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, which periſhed between the altar and the temple: verily I ſay unto you, it ſhall be required of this generation.

There are *three* conſiderable difficulties in the words, which I ſhall endeavour to explain to you.

I. What is meant by the *wiſdom of God.*

II. Who this *Zacharias* was, here mentioned by our Saviour; *from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, who periſhed between the altar and the temple.*

III. In what ſenſe, and with what reaſon and juſtice it is here threaten'd, *that the blood of all the prophets and righteous men, ſhed from the foundation of the world, ſhould be required of that generation.*

I. What is here meant by *the wiſdom of God. Therefore alſo ſaid the wiſdom of God, I will ſend them prophets and Apoſtles,* &c. In St. *Matthew* our Saviour ſpeaks this in his own name, *wherefore behold I ſend unto you prophets:* For which reaſon ſome think that by *the wiſdom of God*, our Saviour here deſign'd *himſelf*; as if he had ſaid, therefore *I, who am the wiſdom of God*, declare unto you. But this is not very probable, our Saviour no where elſe in the Goſpel ſpeaking of himſelf, in any ſuch ſtyle; tho' St. *Paul* calls him *the power of God*, and *the wiſdom of God.* Others think that our Saviour here refers to ſome prophecy of the Old Teſtament, to this purpoſe; *therefore the wiſdom of God hath ſaid*, that is, *the holy Spirit of Wiſdom*, which inſpired the prophets in the Old Teſtament. But this conceit is utterly without ground; for we find no ſuch paſſage, nor any thing to that Senſe, in any of the prophets of the Old Teſtament.

But the moſt plain and ſimple interpretation is this, *therefore hath the wiſdom of God ſaid*, that is, *the moſt wiſe God hath determined* to ſend among you ſuch meſſengers and holy men, and I foreſee that ye will thus abuſe them, and thereby bring wrath and deſtruction upon yourſelves. And whereas our Saviour ſays in St. *Matthew, behold I ſend unto you prophets*; it is very probable, he ſpeaks in God's name, and that it is to be underſtood, *behold, ſays God, I ſend unto you.* And this phraſe of *the wiſdom of*

God, for the moſt wiſe God, is very agreeable to other forms of ſpeech, which we meet with in the *Jewiſh* writers; as, *dicit norma judicii*, *the rule of judgment ſays*, that is, *the moſt juſt and righteous God*; which ſerves very well to explain the phraſe in the *text*, *therefore ſaith the wiſdom of God, I will ſend them prophets and Apoſtles.*

By *Apoſtles* is here meant, all ſorts of *divine meſſengers*: For ſo St. *Matthew* expreſſeth it, *I ſend unto you prophets, and wiſe men, and ſcribes*; that is, ſeveral holy and excellent men, endowed with all ſorts of divine gifts; *prophets, and wiſe men, and ſcribes*; which were the moſt glorious and admired titles among the *Jews*.

And ſome of them they ſhall ſlay and perſecute. St. *Matthew* expreſſeth it more particularly, *ſome of them ye ſhall kill and crucify*; as it was afterwards fulfilled in the two *James's, and Stephen*, who were ſlain by them, and in *Simon* the ſon of *Cleophas*, and before him in *Jeſus the Son of God*, who were crucified; and *ſome of them ye ſhall ſcourge in your ſynagogues*, as we read they did to *Peter* and *John*; and *perſecute them from city to city*, as they did *Paul* and *Barnabas*. The ſending of theſe meſſengers of God among the *Jews*, and this ill uſage of them, the all-wiſe and all-knowing God had determined and foreſeen.

II. Who this *Zacharias* was, here mentioned by our Saviour. And there are ſo many of them (no leſs than *four* of this name) to whom it may with ſome probability be applied, but eſpecially to *two* of them, that it is very hard to determine which of them our Saviour means. Three *Zacharias's* are mentioned in ſcripture, and one more in the hiſtory of *Joſephus*.

There was *Zacharias* the father of *John the Baptiſt*; but whoſe *ſon* he was we do not read; and though of his Death the ſcripture is ſilent, yet there are two traditions about it; one that he was ſlain by *Herod*'s officers, becauſe he would not tell where his ſon, *John the Baptiſt* was, when *Herod* ſent for him. But the credit of this relies upon very doubtful authors. The other is mentioned by ſeveral of the fathers, and the ſubſtance of it is briefly this; that there being a place in the *temple*, where the virgins by themſelves uſed to pray, *the virgin Mary* coming to that place to pray among the virgins, was forbidden, becauſe ſhe had had a child; and that *Zacharias* for maintaining her virginity, was ſet upon *and killed between the temple and the altar*. But this tradition is rejected by St. *Jerome*; and I doubt there is little ground for it.

Zacharias one of the leſſer prophets, was *the ſon of* Barachias, which agrees ſo far with St. *Matthew*'s deſcription of him: But there is no mention in ſcripture that he was *ſlain*; nor could he well be *in the temple*, which was but building in his time; though the author of the *Targum* ſays, that *Zacharias* the ſon of *Ido*, was *ſlain* by the *Jews in the houſe of the Lord's ſanctuary*, on the day of the propitiation; becauſe he admoniſhed them not to do evil before the Lord. Now *Zacharias the ſon of Barachias*, was the grandſon of *Ido*; but yet, I think this was only lapſe of memory, and that he means *Zachary* in the *Chronicles*, who was ſlain by *Joaſh*.

And *he* is the third *Zacharias* I mention'd, 2 *Chron.* xxiv. 21. who as he was reproving the people *for tranſgreſſing the commandment of the Lord, was ſtoned with ſtones at the commandment of the king, in the court of the houſe of the Lord.* And this our Saviour ſeems more particularly to reflect upon, immediately after the *text*; *O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that ſtoneſt the prophets*, &c. Now *this* one would think was ceatainly the perſon intended by our Saviour, and fit to be mentioned with *Abel*, *whoſe blood* is ſaid *to have cried to the Lord*. For of *Zacharias* it is likewiſe ſaid, that *when he died, he ſaid, the Lord look upon it and require it.* And *Druſius* cites a *Jewiſh* writer, ſpeaking thus by way of complaint againſt the *Jewiſh* nation; *becauſe in the midſt of thee fell the prieſts of the Lord, and his prophets, and becauſe before the holy temple in the midſt of thee was ſlain the godly and righteous prophet Zacharias, who lay unburied, nor did the earth cover his blood, but to this day it goes up and ſpeaks in the midſt of thee.* So that none could have been more fit to have been joined with *Abel* in this reſpect.

But as probable as this looks, there are two very great objections againſt it. One is, that St. *Matthew* calls the *Zacharias* ſpoken of by our Saviour, the ſon of *Barachias*; whereas this *Zacharias* ſlain by *Joaſh*, was the ſon of *Jehoiada*; And tho' it be very conſiderable, which St. *Jerome* obſerves, that in the *Hebrew* or *Nazarene* Goſpel, it is *Zacharias* the ſon of *Jehoiada*; yet it is hard to rely upon that, againſt all the *Greek* copies. But a more difficult objection, in my opinion, is that our Saviour ſeems to deſign to mention the two extremes, the firſt and laſt righteous man that was ſlain, and between them two comprehended the good men of all ages, that were perſecuted and ſlain; and if ſo, then that *Zacharias* in the *Chronicles*, who was ſlain ſo long before, can by no means be the perſon.

There is yet a fourth *Zacharias*, mentioned by *Joſephus*, *lib.* 4. the ſon of *Baruch* (which is probably enough the ſame name with *Barachias*) who was the laſt remarkable good man that was ſlain, immediately before the ſiege of *Jeruſalem*; and that as *Joſephus* tells us, in the midſt of the *temple*; which agrees with our Saviour's deſcription of it, *between the altar and the temple*; not the *altar* of incenſe, but of burnt-offerings which was in the outward court, before the aſcent to the *temple*. So that *Grotius* thinks *this* was the man intended by our Saviour; yet ſo that he does both allude to the hiſtory of the former *Zacharias*, and foretel the death of this. And there is but one objection againſt this; that our Saviour ſpeaks of this as already paſt; *whom you have ſlain*; whereas this *Zacharias* was not ſlain till after our Saviour's death. But I think that a ſatisfactory anſwer may be given to this (*viz.*) that our Saviour foretelling thoſe future perſecutions, which ſhould fill up the meaſure of their ſins, and bring final deſtruction upon them, he ſpeaks of this as already paſt, becauſe before that deſtruction ſhould come upon them, it would be true, *they had ſlain him:* So that ſpeaking of the vengeance coming upon them, well might he ſay, *that upon them ſhould come the blood of all the righteous men, from* Abel *to* Zacharias, *whom they had ſlain*, &c.

III. The *third* difficulty remains, and that is, in what ſenſe, and with what reaſon and juſtice it is here threatned, *that the blood of all the prophets and righteous men, ſhed from the foundation of the world, ſhould be required of that generation.* Some underſtand this more ſtrictly; they ſhould be charged with it, and formally puniſhed for it, becauſe in imitating their cruel predeceſſors, they ſhould be guilty of all their cruelty. But there is no neceſſity of this. All that our Saviour ſeems to intend, is this, that their puniſhment in the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, ſhould be ſo horrible, as if God had *once for all* arraigned them of all the righteous blood that ever had been ſhed in the world, and brought the puniſhment of it upon them; though in truth the puniſhment did not exceed the deſert of *their own* ſins. And if this be the meaning of it, there is nothing harſh and unreaſonable in it. And thus I have explained, as well as I can, the ſeveral difficulties in the *text*. I ſhall make two or three obſervations from the main ſcope and deſign of it, and ſo conclude.

I. That it hath been the lot of holy and righteous men, in moſt ages of the world, to meet with very bad uſage, to be *perſecuted and ſlain*. The devil began this work early. When there were but three men in all the world, and two of them brethren; the one *ſlew* the other, *becauſe he was more righteous*, and ſerved God better than he did. And this trade hath continued, and been practiſed more or leſs, in moſt ages and generations of the world, as might be deduced through the hiſtory of the Old and New Teſtament, and of moſt ages ſince, *though the rod of the wicked hath not always abode upon the back of the righteous*, leſt at laſt piety ſhould be quite diſcouraged, and *the faithful fail from among the children of men*. The people and the church of God have had many intervals of peace and proſperity; and ſometimes for a long continuance, the favour and countenance of authority, and the powers of the world, and the laws of nations on their ſide.

But yet there is a continual *enmity between the ſeed of the woman, and the ſerpent, between the righteous and the wicked, between thoſe that ſerve God, and thoſe that ſerve him not*; becauſe their ways are contrary one to another, and quite of another faſhion, their principles and practices do contradict and claſh with one another; the virtues of good men are a continual upbraiding of the bad, a living reproof and reproach to them: ſo that it is no wonder, that evil men do ſo violently hate and perſecute the good, and do by all means endeavour to remove out of the way thoſe who are ſo oppoſite and offenſive to them.

II. We may obſerve likewiſe hence, how great a ſin they are guilty of, who perſecute the righteous, and how terrible a vengeance from God waits on them. Particular examples of this have been in all ages: but as the guilt of this ſin never went higher, than at this time foretold by our Saviour, when God ſent to the *Jews* ſuch *prophets, and wiſe men, and ſcribes*, and ſuch a number of them as never upon any occaſion were ſent into the world, and they uſed them in that bloody and barbarous manner; no wonder, if the vengeance that came upon them was ſuch as never had been before; and if, after they had *filled up the meaſure* of their ſins, by *crucifying the Lord Jeſus*, and *perſecuting his Apoſtles*, and *ſtoning and killing* all *the prophets* that were ſent unto them, *the wrath of God came upon them to the utmoſt*, and ſuch a terrible deſtruction from the Lord, as never befel any people; inſomuch that our Saviour, upon the foreſight and mention of it, forty years before it happened, could not but *weep over them*, and expreſs himſelf in thoſe compaſſionate words, *O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the prophets, and ſtoneſt them that are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not! Behold your houſe is left unto you deſolate.*

III. From this whole paſſage of our Saviour, which I have been explaining to you, we may learn how vain it is for men to pretend to honour *the dead ſaints*, when they perſecute *the living*. This was the great hypocriſy of *the Scribes and Phariſees* among the *Jews* in our Saviour's time; and is at this day of the rulers and governors of the *Roman* church among us *Chriſtians*; nay they exceed *the Scribes and Phariſees*, not only in their veneration of *the ancient ſaints and righteous men*, but alſo, if it be poſſible, in their malice and cruelty towards the living. For they not only build coſtly monuments to their memory, which was the utmoſt *the Scribes and Phariſees* did, but they honour them with ſhrines and rich offerings, with prayers and vows to them, more frequent than to Almighty God himſelf, and our bleſſed Saviour; but then they hate and perſecute *the living*, with as great violence and cruelty, as ever was uſed by any part of mankind towards one another. 'Tis true they do it under the notion of *hereſy*; and ſo did the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* too, as St. *Paul* witneſſeth. *After the way which ye call hereſy, ſo worſhip I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets.* So they call us *hereticks*; though we receive and believe all that is written in the holy ſcriptures, only rejecting their additions, whereby they *would make the commandment of God of none effect*. And as *Rome* is parallel with *Jeruſalem* in many other reſpects; ſo eſpecially in the bloody perſecution of righteous men: And as *Jeruſalem* is charged by our Saviour with *the blood of all the prophets and righteous men* of all ages; ſo St. *John* in the *Revelation* ſays of *Rome*, that *in her was found the blood of prophets, and of ſaints, and of all that were ſlain upon the earth*, chap. xviii. 24. Which is no leſs true of *Rome Chriſtian*, than of *Rome Pagan*. In all the churches and religions in the world, and perhaps in *Rome Pagan* herſelf, hath not ſo much innocent blood been ſhed, as in *Rome Chriſtian* and *Catholick*, and that *under a pretence of religion:* and no doubt there is a day coming, when ſhe ſhall be called to a heavy account for theſe things, *when the heavens ſhall rejoice over her, and the holy Angels and prophets, becauſe God hath avenged them on her.*

SERMON XXVIII.

Preach'd Nov. 5. 1682.

The Danger of Zeal, without Knowledge.

ROM. x. 2.

I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.

THERE is nothing more commonly cried up, than *zeal in religion*; and yet there is nothing in which men do more frequently and fatally miſtake and miſcarry, and in the expreſſions and effects whereof men ought to govern themſelves with more care and caution. To ſpeak the truth, *zeal* is as all other paſſions are, in its own nature indifferent, and of itſelf neither good nor bad; but according to the object and degree of it: for *zeal* is nothing elſe, but *an earneſt concernment for, or againſt, ſomething, and a violent purſuit and proſecution of it*. For if it be applied to a right object, ſo as we be earneſtly concerned for things that are unqueſtionably good; and againſt things that are unqueſtionably evil; and in a due degree; that is, if the expreſſion of it be proportionable to the leſs or greater good or evil of things; then it is a commendable quality or virtue: but if it be wrong placed and we be earneſtly concerned for that which is evil, and againſt that which is good, or about things which are of an indifferent or doubtful nature, as to the good and evil of them; or if we notoriouſly exceed in the degree of it, being more zealouſly concerned about things, than they deſerve, and zealouſly concerned about leſſer things, to the prejudice of greater; in any of theſe caſes, it is ſo far from being a virtue, that it is a vice, of a moſt pernicious and miſchievous conſequence, and many times hath as bad effects, as can proceed from the worſt principle or diſpoſition of mind.

It is ſometimes uſed in a good ſenſe; but it is, when it is applied to the beſt things, in which the honour of God, and the ſalvation of men is concerned, to the great and unqueſtionable duties of religion. As zeal for the honour of God, and the place of his publick worſhip, in oppoſition to profaneneſs, *John* ii. 17. *The zeal of thine houſe hath eaten me up:* For an earneſt deſire of thoſe gifts, whereby we are to edify the church, 1 *Cor.* xii. 31. *But covet earneſtly the beſt gifts,* ſo we render the words; *be zealous of the beſt gifts;* ſo it is in the *Greek:* for a forwardneſs and readineſs to relieve the neceſſities of the ſaints, 2 *Cor.* ix. 2. *I know the forwardneſs of your minds, and your zeal hath provoked very many.* And to the ſame purpoſe is that expreſſion, *Tit.* ii. 14. *zealous of good works.* And then for a zeal for the ſalvation of mens ſouls, 2 *Cor.* xi. 2. *I am zealous of you with a godly zeal.*

But the word is much more frequently in ſcripture uſed in a bad ſenſe, for a malicious and furious rage, againſt the profeſſors of chriſtianity, *Acts* v. 17, 18. *Then the high-prieſt, and they that were with him, were filled with indignation* (the word is *zeal*) *and laid their hands on the Apoſtles, and put them in priſon.* And, chap. xiii. 45. it is ſaid, *the Jews were filled with zeal, and ſpake againſt thoſe things which were ſpoken by Paul, contradicting and blaſpheming.* And, chap. xvii. 5. *The Jews which believed not, moved with zeal, gathered a company, and ſet all the city in an uproar.*

'Tis frequently reckoned amongſt *the works of the fleſh,* and mentioned in the company of the greateſt vices and crimes; wrath, contention, diviſion, ſedition, murders, tumults, confuſions. *Rom.* xiii. 13. *Let us walk honeſtly as in the day, not in chambering and wantonneſs, not in ſtrife and zeal.* 1 Cor. iii. 3. *Whereas there is among you zeal, and ſtrife, and diviſions; are ye not carnal?* 2 Cor. xii. 20. *Leſt there be debates, zeal, wrath, ſtrife.* Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. *The works of the fleſh are manifeſt,* among which the Apoſtle reckons, *hatred, variance, zeal, wrath, ſtrife, ſeditions, hereſies, envyings, murders.* St. *James* calls *it a bitter zeal;* James iii. 14, 15, 16. *But if ye have bitter zeal and ſtrife in your hearts, glory not, and lye not againſt the truth. This wiſdom deſcendeth not from above; but is earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh. For where zeal and ſtrife is, there is confuſion and every evil work.* By which it appears that *zeal* moſt frequently goes under a bad name and character in ſcripture; *zeal,* I mean, *in matters of religion;* for of *that* moſt of the texts I have mentioned ſpeak; and this is that which St. *Paul* means here in the *text,* by *a zeal of God,* that is, *a zeal about religion, and divine things. I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.*

In which words the Apoſtle being deſirous to ſay the beſt he could of his countrymen, the *Jews,* he commends *the good meaning* of their *zeal,* and blames the *ill conduct* of it. *I bear them record,* μαρτυρῶ αὐτοῖς, *I give this teſtimony on their behalf, that they have a zeal of God,* that is, that by all this fierceneſs againſt the chriſtian religion, they intend the honour of God, and think they do him ſervice: but yet this *zeal* is greatly to be condemned; becauſe it is *a miſtaken and miſguided zeal* not at all directed as it ſhould be; *they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.*

From which words I ſhall take into conſideration theſe *three* things.

I. What are the qualifications and properties of *a zeal according to knowledge.*

II. By what marks and characters we may know *that zeal,* which here, and elſewhere in ſcripture, is condemned, as *not being according to knowledge.*

III. How far the doing of any thing, out of *a zeal for God,* doth mitigate and extenuate the evil of it. For when the Apoſtle here teſtifies concerning the *Jews,* that they had *a zeal of God;* he ſpeaks this in favour of them, and by way of mitigation of their faults. When I have handled theſe *three* particulars, I ſhall apply my diſcourſe to the preſent occaſion of *this day.*

I. What are the qualifications and properties of *a zeal according to knowledge.* I ſhall mention theſe *three.*

1. That our zeal be right, in reſpect of its object.
2. That the meaſure and degree of it be proportioned to the good or evil of things, about which it is converſant.
3. That we purſue it by lawful ways and means.

1. That our zeal be right, in reſpect of its object; I mean, that thoſe things which we are zealous for, be certainly and conſiderably good; and that thoſe things which we are zealous againſt, be certainly and conſiderably evil. A miſtake in any of theſe quite mars our zeal, and ſpoils the virtue of it: and though it be never ſo much intended for God, it is not at all pleaſing and acceptable to him; becauſe it is a blind and ignorant and miſtaken zeal: and the hotter, the worſe; it is not an heavenly fire, *that comes down from above*; but it is like the fire of hell, heat without light. If we miſtake good and evil, and be zealouſly concerned, againſt that which is good, or for that which is evil; the greater our zeal is, the greater is our fault; and inſtead of doing God and religion ſervice and credit, we do the greateſt miſchief and diſhonour we can to them both: or if the thing about which our zeal is converſant, be of a doubtful and uncertain nature; this is not properly an object of zeal. Men ſhould never be earneſt for or againſt any thing, but upon clear and certain grounds, that what we contend ſo earneſtly for, is undoubtedly good; and that which we are ſo violent againſt, is undoubtedly evil: If it be not, we are *zealous for we know not what*, and *that* I am ſure *is a zeal not according to knowledge.*

And if the thing be *certainly* good or evil, which we are ſo concerned about; it muſt alſo be *conſiderably* ſo: otherwiſe it will not warrant our being zealous about it. All truth is good, and all error bad; but there are many truths ſo inconſiderable, and which have ſo ſmall an influence upon practice, that they do not deſerve our zeal and earneſt contention about them; and ſo likewiſe are there many errors and miſtakes, of ſo ſlight and inconſiderable a nature, that it were better men ſhould be let alone in them, than provoked to quarrel and contend about them.

Thus that great heat that was in the chriſtian church, about the time of obſerving *Eaſter*, was, in my opinion, *a zeal not according to knowledge.* They were on both ſides agreed in the main, which was to celebrate the memory of our Saviour's reſurrection: But there were different cuſtoms about the time, which was a matter of no ſuch conſideration, as to deſerve ſo much heat and zeal about it, eſpecially conſidering the uncharitable and miſchievous conſequences of that difference.

2. That our *zeal* may be *according to knowledge*; the meaſure and degree of it muſt be proportioned to the good or evil of things, about which it is converſant. That is *an ignorant zeal*, which is converſant about leſſer things, and unconcerned for greater. Such was the zeal of the Scribes and Phariſees, who were mightily concerned about external and leſſer matters; but took little or no care of inward purity, and real and ſubſtantial goodneſs; they were very careful, *not to eat with unwaſh'd hands, and to make clean the outſide of the cup and platter*; but then *they were full of extortion, and all unrighteouſneſs: they pay'd tithe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin; but omitted the weightier things, judgment, mercy, and fidelity*; or, as St. *Luke* expreſſeth it, *they paſt over judgment and the love of God.*

A zealous ſtrictneſs about external rites and matters of difference, where there is a viſible neglect of the ſubſtantial duties of religion, and the great virtues of a good life, is either a groſs ignorance of the true nature of religion, or a fulſom hypocriſy. And ſo likewiſe is a loud and zealous outcry againſt rites and ceremonies, and the impoſition of indifferent things in religion, when men can releaſe themſelves from the obligation of natural and moral duties, and *paſs over mercy and juſtice and charity.*

3. A *zeal* that is *according to knowledge*, muſt be purſued and proſecuted by lawful and warrantable means. No zeal for God and his glory, for his true church and religion, will juſtify the doing of that which is morally and in itſelf evil. *Will ye ſpeak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him? We* do not know what belongs to the honour of God and religion, if we think to promote his glory, by means ſo diſhonourable and offenſive to him. The Apoſtle pronounceth it *a damnable ſin*, for any to charge this doctrine upon chriſtianity, *that evil may be done for a good end, and to promote the glory of God*, Rom. iii. 8. *As we be ſlanderouſly reported, and as ſome affirm that we ſay, let us do evil that good may come; whoſe damnation is juſt.*

And yet nothing is more frequent, than for men, out of *a zeal for God and religion*, to overlook the evil and unlawfulneſs of the means they uſe, for the advancing ſo good an end. This is that which hath ſanctified thoſe refined arts of lying and perjury, by equivocation and mental reſervation; thoſe ſeditious ways of diſturbing the peace of kingdoms, by treaſon and rebellion, by the excommunicating and depoſing of princes, upon pretence of *hereſy*; of extirpating thoſe, whom they pleaſe to call *hereticks*, by inquiſitions, and croiſados, and maſſacres; and this, not only in the opinion of private perſons, but in the judgment of *popes*, and of *general councils*. I proceed in the

IId Place to ſhew by what marks and characters we may know the contrary *zeal*, that which is *not according to knowledge*, which is condemned here in the *text*, and very frequently in other places of ſcripture: And though *this* may be ſufficiently known by the contrary marks and properties (which I ſhall but briefly mention) yet to diſcover it more fully, I ſhall add *one* or *two* more very groſs and ſenſible ſigns and inſtances of it.

1. It is *a zeal without knowledge*, that is miſtaken in the proper object of it, that calls *good evil*, and *evil good*; a zeal for groſs errors and ſuperſtitions, plainly contrary either to the revelation of God's word, or the light of reaſon, or to common ſenſe; any or all of theſe cannot be *a zeal according to knowledge*. A zeal for the worſhip of images, for praying to ſaints and Angels, contrary to the plain law and word of God; a zeal for the ſacrilegious depriving of the people of half the ſacrament, contrary to our Saviour's plain inſtitution, and the acknowledged practice of the catholick church, for a thouſand years; a zeal for *that moſt abſurd* of all doctrines that ever was taught in any religion, I mean *the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation*, not only without any ſufficient authority from ſcripture (as is acknowledged by ſeveral of the moſt learned of the *Roman* church) but contrary to reaſon, and in defiance of the ſenſe of all mankind; a zeal for theſe, and many more like groſs errors and practices, cannot poſſibly be *a zeal according to knowledge*.

2. That is *a zeal without knowledge*, the degree whereof is manifeſtly diſproportioned to the good or evil of things about which it is converſant; when there is in men a greater and fiercer zeal for the externals of religion, than for the vital and eſſential parts of it; *for the traditions of men*, than for *the commandments of God*; for bodily ſeverities, than for the mortification of our luſts; for the means of religion, than for the end of it: a greater zeal againſt the omiſſion and neglect of ſome ſenſeleſs and ſuperſtitious practices, than againſt the practice of the groſſeſt immoralities; and againſt the deniers of the doctrines of tranſubſtantiation, and of the pope's infallibility, an equal, if not a greater zeal (I am ſure a more ſevere proſecution) than againſt thoſe who deny our Saviour to be the true *Meſſias*, and the ſon of God: This certainly is not *a zeal according to knowledge*. Nor,

3. That which is proſecuted by unlawful and unwarrantable means. That cannot be *a zeal of God according to knowledge*, which warrants *the doing of evil, that good may come*; the violating of truth and faith, and of the peace of human ſociety, for the cauſe of the catholick church; and breaking the eternal and immutable laws of God, for the advancing of his glory. Nor,

4. An uncharitable zeal, which is an enemy to peace and order, and thinks itſelf ſufficiently warranted to ſeparate from the communion of Chriſtians, and to break the peace of the church, upon every ſcruple, and upon every fancy and conceit of unlawful impoſitions, though in the moſt indifferent things; nay upon this ſingle point, *becauſe a thing which they acknowledge lawful, and indifferent in itſelf, is in the worſhip of God enjoined by authority*; the moſt unreaſonable principle that I think ever was avowed among Chriſtians; not to do a thing which otherwiſe they might do, only becauſe it is enjoined; and to fancy that an indifferent thing becomes preſently unlawful, becauſe it is commanded by lawful authority; and that it is a ſin to do any thing, in the worſhip of God, which is not left to their liberty, whether they will do it or not. This is not only *a zeal without knowledge*, but *contrary to common ſenſe*. Nor,

5. A furious and cruel zeal, which St. *James* calls *a bitter*, or *a wrathful zeal*, and which tends to *confuſion and every evil work*, which is blind with its own rage, and makes men, as St. *Paul* ſays of himſelf, when he perſecuted the Chriſtians, *exceedingly mad* againſt all that differ from them, and ſtand in the way of their fierce and outrageous zeal.

6. And *laſtly*, A zeal for ignorance, is moſt certainly *not a zeal according to knowledge*; and *this is a zeal* peculiar to the church of *Rome*, by ſuch ſtrict laws to forbid people the uſe of the holy ſcriptures in a known tongue; nay not ſo much as to allow them to underſtand what they do in the ſervice of God; to require them to be preſent at their publick prayers, and to join with them in them, without letting them know the meaning

of them; to pretend to teach them, by reading leſſons to them in an unknown tongue; and all this under pretence of increaſing their devotion; as if the leſs men underſtand of the ſervice of God, the more they would be affected with it, and edified by it.

And yet there is nothing in which the church of *Rome* hath been more *zealouſly* concerned, than to keep the people in ignorance: Nothing they have oppoſed with more obſtinacy, againſt the repeated application of princes and people, at the beginning of the reformation, than to allow the people the uſe of the ſcriptures, and their public prayers, in a known tongue. And their obſtinacy in this point, was not without reaſon; nothing being more certain, than that if the people were once brought to underſtand the ſcriptures, they would ſoon quite their religion, which in ſo many things is ſo directly contrary to the word of God. The

IIId And laſt thing remains to be ſpoken to, *viz.* How far the doing of things, out of *a zeal for God,* doth mitigate and extenuate the evil of them. For when the Apoſtle here teſtifies concerning the *Jews,* that they had *a zeal of God,* he ſpeaks this in favour of them, and by way of mitigation of their fault. *I bear them record;* I who was once acted by this ignorant and furious zeal, which now poſſeſſeth them, and perſecuted the Chriſtians in the ſame outrageous manner, as they ſtill continue to do, and all this with a very good conſcience, as I thought, and out of *a zeal for God,* and the true religion. So he tells us, *Acts* xxvi. 9. *I verily thought with myſelf, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jeſus of Nazareth.* So that his zeal was ſincere, and with a real intention to do ſervice to God and religion; and yet for all that was very faulty and ſinful, and if he had perſiſted in it, damnable; ſo that his confidence, that he was in the right, and the ſincerity of his zeal in acting according to the perſuaſion of his conſcience, did not alter the nature of the actions he did out of this zeal, and make them leſs wicked in themſelves; though it was ſome mitigation of the fault of the perſon, and render'd him more capable of the mercy of God by repentance, than if he had done contrary to his conſcience, and the clear convictions of his own mind.

And therefore the beſt way to underſtand the great evil and wickedneſs of this furious and blind zeal, will be, to conſider the account which St. *Paul,* after his converſion, gives of his own doings, and what load he lays upon himſelf, notwithſtanding the ſincerity of his zeal, and that he acted according to his conſcience. *Acts* viii. and ix. you have the hiſtory at large of his outrageous doings, how *he made havock of the church, entring into every houſe, and haling men and women to priſon; how he breathed out threatnings and ſlaughter againſt the diſciples of the Lord.* Acts xxii. 4. *I perſecuted,* ſays he, *this way unto the death, binding and delivering into priſons both men and women.* And chap. xxvi. 10, 11. *Many of thee ſaints did I ſhut up in priſon, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice againſt them; and I puniſhed them often in every ſynagogue, and compelled them to blaſpheme; and being exceedingly mad againſt them, I perſecuted them even to ſtrange cities.* Gal. i. 13, 14. *Ye have heard,* ſays he, *of my converſation in times paſt, in the Jews religion; how that beyond meaſure I perſecuted the church of God, and waſted it, being exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.* 1 Tim. i. 13. *Who was before a blaſphemer, a perſecutor and injurious.* So that he chargeth himſelf with the guilt of blaſphemy and murder, and a moſt furious and outrageous perſecution of good men; for which elſewhere he pronounceth himſelf *the chief of ſinners.* From whence it evidently appears, that men may do the moſt wicked and damnable ſins, out of *a zeal for God.*

And this was the caſe of many of the *Jews,* as our Saviour foretold, that *the time ſhould come, when they ſhould kill them, thinking they did God good ſervice.* But yet for all this, the Apoſtles of our Lord make no ſcruple, to charge them with downright murder. *Acts* ii. 23. ſpeaking of their putting our Saviour to death, *whom ye by wicked hands have crucified and ſlain.* And *Acts* vii. 52. *The juſt one, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.*

Yet notwithſtanding their ſin was of this high nature in itſelf, it was ſome mitigation of the fault of the perſons, that they did theſe things out of *an ignorant zeal,* and rendred them more capable of the mercy of God, upon their repentance. And upon this account our Saviour interceded with God for mercy for them; *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* St. *Peter* alſo pleads the ſame in mitigation of their fault, *Acts* iii. 17. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did alſo your rulers.* And St. *Paul* tells us, that *he found mercy,* upon his repentance, on this account, 1 *Tim.* i. 13. *But I obtained mercy, becauſe I did it igno-*

rantly, and in unbelief. But ſtill, for all this, wicked things done out of conſcience and zeal for God, are damnable, and will prove ſo, without repentance.

I ſhall now draw ſome *inferences* from this diſcourſe, by way of application.

1. If it be ſo neceſſary, that our zeal be directed by knowledge; this ſhews us how dangerous a thing zeal is in the weak and ignorant ſort of people. Zeal is an edge-tool, which children in underſtanding ſhould not meddle withal; and yet it moſt frequently poſſeſſeth the weakeſt minds; and commonly by how much *the leſs knowing* people are, by ſo much *the more zealous* they are: And in the church of *Rome*, where knowledge is profeſſedly diſcouraged, and ſuppreſt in the common people, zeal is mightily countenanced and cheriſhed. And they make great uſe of it; for this blind and furious zeal, is that which inſpires them to do ſuch cruel and barbarous things, as were hardly ever acted among the heathen. Zeal is only fit for wiſe men; but it is chiefly in faſhion among fools.

Nay it is dangerous in the hands of wiſe men, and to be govern'd and kept in with a ſtrict rein; otherwiſe it will tranſport them to the doing of undue and irregular things. *Moſes*, one of the wiſeſt and beſt of men, and moſt likely to govern and manage his zeal as he ought, and to keep aloof from all exceſs and extravagance, being *the meekeſt man upon earth*; yet he was ſo ſurpriſed, upon a ſudden occaſion, that *in a fit of zeal*, he let fall the two tables of the law, which he had but juſt received from God, and daſh'd them in pieces. A true emblem of *an ungoverned zeal*, in the tranſport whereof even good men are apt to forget the laws of God, and let them fall out of their hands, and to break all the obligations of natural and moral duties.

2. From hence we plainly ſee, that men may do the worſt and wickedeſt things out of *a zeal for God* and religion. Thus it was among the *Jews*, who ingroſt ſalvation to themſelves, and deny'd the poſſibility of it to all the world beſides; and the church of *Rome* have taken copy by them, as in an arrogant conceit of themſelves, ſo in the blindneſs, and fury, and uncharitableneſs of their zeal towards all, who refuſe to ſubmit to their authority and directions.

And as the teachers and rulers of the *Jewiſh* church did of old, ſo doth the church of *Rome* now; *they take away the key of knowledge from the people, and will neither enter into the kingdom of heaven themſelves, nor ſuffer thoſe that would, to enter in.* They brand for *hereticks*, thoſe who make the holy ſcriptures the rule of their faith and worſhip; as St. *Paul* tells us the *Jews* did in his time. *Acts* xxiv. 14. *After the way which they call hereſy, ſo worſhip I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law, and the prophets.* They eſtabliſh the merit of their own righteouſneſs, not ſubmitting to the righteouſneſs of God, by the faith of Jeſus Chriſt. So St. *Paul* tells us the *Jews* did, in the verſe immediately after the text; *for they being ignorant of God's righteouſneſs, and going about to eſtabliſh their own righteouſneſs, have not ſubmitted themſelves to the righteouſneſs of God.* And as the *Jews* anathematiz'd and excommunicated the firſt Chriſtians, and perſecuted them to the death, as our Saviour foretold, *that the time would come, when they ſhould put them out of their ſynagogues, yea and kill them, thinking they did God good ſervice*; ſo the church of *Rome* hath, for many ages, uſed the ſincere profeſſors of the ſame religion, perſecuting them, firſt with excommunication, and then with fire and faggot: and with all the violence and fury in the world endeavouring the utter extirpation and ruin of them, by bloody *Croiſados* and a barbarous *inquiſition*, by treacherous *maſſacres*, and all ſorts of *helliſh plots and machinations*; witneſs the monſtrous deſign of *this day*, never to be remembred or mentioned without horror, *to have deſtroyed at one blow, and have ſwallowed up in common ruin, our king and prince, and nobles, and the repreſentative body of the whole nation*; witneſs the bloody maſſacre of *Ireland*, and all their wicked deſigns and practices continued to this very day.

3. And *laſtly*, That *zeal for God* and religion, does not alter the nature of actions done upon that account. Perſecution and murder of the ſincere profeſſors of religion, are *damnable ſins*, and no *zeal for God and religion* can excuſe them, or take away the guilt of them; *zeal for God* will juſtify no action that we do, unleſs there be *diſcretion* to juſtify our *zeal*.

There is nothing oftner miſleads men, than a miſguided zeal; it is an *ignis fatuus*, a *falſe fire*, which often leads men into bogs and precipices; it appears in the night, in dark and ignorant and weak minds, and offers itſelf a guide to thoſe who have loſt their way; it is one of the moſt ungovernable paſſions of human nature, and therefore requires great knowledge and judgment to manage it, and keep it within bounds. It is like fire, a good ſervant, but a bad maſter; if it once get head, it conſumes and devours all before it, and the great danger and miſchief of it is, that it is moſt commonly found where it ſhould not be, and poſſeſſes thoſe moſt, who are leaſt fit to govern it; and moſt frequently employed about what it ſhould not be; and ten to one but it is either miſtaken in the *object*, or in the *meaſure* and degree of it; and even when it is a virtue, it is a nice and dangerous one; for the wiſeſt men are apt to mingle their own *paſſions* and *intereſts* with their *zeal for God and religion.* So that it is not enough that men are acted by *a zeal for God,* and do ſincerely follow the dictates of their conſciences; but they muſt be careful to inform their conſciences, and not ſuffer themſelves to be violently tranſported and hurried on by their own paſſions and prejudice, and by a blind and furious *zeal without knowledge.*

But what then? Would we have men not follow their own conſciences, or act contrary to them? No, by no means: For though conſcience be not our *rule*; yet it is our *immediate guide*; and he does ill, who does act againſt his conſcience. But men muſt be careful how they ſettle their practical judgment of things, and conclude things to be lawful or unlawful, duties or ſins, without reaſon and good ground.

God hath given us underſtandings to try and examine things, and the light of his word to direct us in this trial; and if we will judge raſhly, and ſuffer ourſelves to be hurried by prejudice or paſſion, *the errors of our judgment* become *faults of our lives:* For God expects from us that we ſhould weigh and conſider what we do; and when he hath afforded us light enough to diſcern between *good* and *evil,* that we ſhould carefully follow the direction of it; that we ſhould be ſuſpicious of ourſelves, when our zeal carries us to do things that are furious and cruel, falſe and treacherous, and have a horrid appearance even to the light of nature; we ſhould queſtion *that zeal* which is ſo contrary to chriſtian goodneſs and meekneſs, to peace and charity, and which tends to *confuſion and every evil work.*

I will conclude all with that excellent paſſage of St. *James,* which will ſhew us how little regard is to be had to many mens pretences of zeal for religion, *James* iii. 13. *Who is a wiſe man, and endued with knowledge amongſt you? Let him ſhew out of a good converſation his works with meekneſs of wiſdom. But if you have bitter zeal and ſtrife in your hearts; glory not, and lye not againſt the truth. This wiſdom deſcendeth not from above; but is earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh. For where zeal and ſtrife is; there is confuſion, and every evil work. But the wiſdom which is from above, is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocriſy: and the fruit of righteouſneſs is ſown in peace of them that make peace.*

SERMON XXIX.

Preach'd on Nov. 5, 1686.

The beſt Men liable to the worſt Treatment, from miſtaken Zealots.

JOHN XVI. 2.

They ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues: Yea, the time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you, will think that he doth God ſervice.

THESE words were ſpoken by our bleſſed Saviour, when he was about to leave the world; at the thoughts whereof, finding his diſciples to be exceedingly troubled, he comforts them by the conſideration of the great benefit and advantage which from thence would accrue to them; he tells them that he was going to heaven to intercede for them, and to make way for their admiſſion there; and withal promiſeth, that his Father would ſend the Holy Ghoſt, who ſhould abundantly ſupply the want of *his* preſence with them: but he tells them at the ſame time, that they ſhould meet with very ill entertainment and uſage from the world: but ſo had *he*, chap. xv. 18. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me, before it hated you*; and why ſhould *they* expect to be better treated than *he* was? ver. 20. *remember the word that I ſaid unto you, the ſervant is not greater than the Lord*; *if they have perſecuted me, they will alſo perſecute you.*

And at the beginning of this chapter he tells them, that he did on purpoſe forewarn them of theſe things, to prepare their minds beforehand, and to arm them againſt the worſt that might happen; ver. 1. *theſe things have I ſpoken unto you that you ſhould not be offended.* And then he declares more particularly, how far the rage and malice of men ſhould proceed againſt them, and in what kind they ſhould ſuffer: *They ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you will think that he doth God ſervice.*

So that our Saviour here foretells two ſorts of perſecution, which his diſciples ſhould be exerciſed withal, *excomunication*; *they ſhall put you out of their ſynagogues:* And *exciſion*; *yea the time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you will think that he doth God ſervice.* And theſe perhaps were but ſeveral kinds and degrees of *excommunication*; for the clearer underſtanding whereof, it will be requiſite briefly to explain the three degrees of *excomunication* among the *Jews.*

The firſt call'd *Niddui*, is that which our Saviour here means, by *putting out of the ſynagogue*; and which he elſewhere expreſſeth by ἀφόρισμος, or *ſeparation.* Luke vi. 22. *Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall hate you, and when they ſhall ſeparate you from their company.* And the effect *of this excommunication* was to exclude men from the communion of the church and people of God, and from his ſervice, which was a great diſgrace; becauſe after this ſentence none of the *Jews* were to converſe with them, but to look upon them *as heathens and publicans.*

The ſecond degree of this cenſure was called *Cherem*; which included the firſt, but extended farther, to the confiſcation of goods into the ſacred treaſury, and devoting them to God; after which there was no redemption of them. And of this we find expreſs mention, *Ezra* x. 7, 8. where it is ſaid, *that they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jeruſalem, unto all the children of the captivity, that they ſhould gather themſelves together unto Jeruſalem*; *and that whoſoever would not come within three days, according to the councils of the princes and elders, all his ſubſtance ſhould be devoted, and himſelf ſeparated from the congregation of thoſe that had been carried away.*

The third degree was *Shammatha*, when the rebellious and contumacious perſon was anathematized and devoted, and as ſome conceive, according to the law (*Levit.* xxvii. 29.) was to be put to death; though other very knowing men in the Jewiſh learning think it amounted to no more than a final ſentence, whereby they were left to the judgment of God, by ſome remarkable judgment of his to be cut off from the congregation of *Iſrael.*

Of the firſt and laſt of theſe degrees of excommunication, our Saviour ſeems here to ſpeak; but whether in both inſtances in the *text*, he alludes in the one to the loweſt, and in the other to the higheſt degree of *excommunication* among the *Jews*, is not ſo certain. To the *firſt* he plainly does, when he ſays, *they ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues:* and then he adds, that they ſhould proceed much higher againſt them, even to put them to death; *the time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you will think that he doth God ſervice*; that is, they ſhould not only think it *lawful* to kill them, but look upon it as *a duty*, as a high act of religion, as an acceptable piece of worſhip, and *a ſacrifice well-pleaſing to God.* For ſo indeed the word does not only import, but moſt properly ſignify, *whoſoever killeth you ſhall think*, λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ, *that he offers a ſacrifice to God*; for ſo the word λατρεία is ſometimes uſed, for *a ſacrifice*; but being joined with προσφέρειν ſeems neceſſarily to be determined to that ſenſe.

From the words thus explained, I ſhall make theſe following *obſervations*, very proper for our conſideration upon the occaſion of *this day.*

1. That the beſt of men may be ſeparated and excluded from the communion of thoſe who may aſſume to themſelves to be the true and the only true church; yea and ſuffer under the notion of very bad and criminal perſons. This our Saviour here foretold of his Apoſtles, ſome of the beſt men that ever lived: *They ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues.*

2. That they who are thus excommunicated, by the pretended true church, may nevertheleſs be real members of the true church of Chriſt. Though the Apoſtles were thus

dealt withal by the Jewiſh church, they did not ceaſe for all that to be members of the true church of God.

3. That from uncharitable cenſures men do eaſily and almoſt naturally proceed to cruel actions. After they had *put* the diſciples of our Lord *out of their ſynagogues*, and thereby concluded them to be *hereticks* and *reprobates*, they preſently proceed to *kill* them, as not worthy to live. *They ſhall put you out of their ſynagogues*; and when they have done that, they will ſoon after think it a thing not only fit, but pious and meritorious, to put you to death; *the time will come, that they will think it a good ſervice to God, to kill you.*

4. That men may do the vileſt things, and the moſt wicked, not only under a *grave pretence* of religion, but out of a *real opinion and perſuaſion* that they do religiouſly. Murder is certainly one of the greateſt and moſt crying ſins; and yet our Saviour foretels, that the *Jews* ſhould put his diſciples to death, being verily perſuaded that in ſo doing they offered a moſt acceptable ſacrifice to God: *Yea the time ſhall come, that whoſoever killeth you ſhall think that he offers a ſacrifice to God.*

5. That ſuch actions are never the leſs horribly impious and wicked, notwithſtanding the good mind with which, and the good end for which they are done. The *Jews* were not excuſed from the guilt of perſecution and murder, for all they thought they did well in killing the diſciples of our Lord.

6. I obſerve that the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt. Religion is the higheſt accompliſhment and perfection of human nature; and zeal for God and his truth an excellent quality, and highly acceptable to God: And yet nothing is more barbarous, and ſpurs men on to more horrible impieties, than a blind zeal for God, and falſe and miſtaken principles in the matter of religion; as is plain from the inſtances here before us in the *text*. I ſhall ſpeak as briefly as I can to theſe *obſervations*.

1. That the beſt of men may be ſeparated and excluded from the communion of thoſe, who may aſſume to be the true and only true church, and that under the notion of very bad and criminal perſons. This our Saviour foretels in the *text* ſhould be the fate of his Apoſtles, ſome of the beſt and holieſt perſons that ever lived; *they ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues.*

And what the *Jews* did in the beginning of chriſtianity, to the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour, hath been too frequently practiſed ſince, by ſome of the profeſſors of chriſtianity towards one another; and very good men have in ſeveral ages fallen under the cenſure of *excommunication*, and have been ſeparated from the external communion of the church, and branded with the odious names of *hereticks* and *apoſtates*, by thoſe who have arrogated to themſelves to be *the only orthodox and true church*, and have gotten the external power and management of religion into their hands; witneſs the caſe of *Athanaſius* and others, in the reign and prevalency of *Arianiſm*; and the ill treatment, that not only particular perſons, eminent for their learning and piety, but whole churches have met with in this kind, from that haughty and uncharitable church, which makes nothing of thundering out this moſt fearful ſentence of *excommunication*, againſt perſons, and churches much better and more chriſtian than herſelf, and againſt all that will not ſubmit to her pretended infallibility, and uſurped authority over the ſouls and conſciences of men.

But it is our great comfort, that the Apoſtles and diſciples of our Lord and maſter were thus uſed, by a church that made the ſame pretences that they do, and upon grounds every whit as plauſible, as I could clearly ſhew, if I were minded to purſue and make out this compariſon.

2. They who are thus excommunicated, by the pretended only true church, may nevertheleſs be true members of the church of Chriſt. Though the Apoſtles were thus dealt withal by the Jewiſh church, they did not ceaſe for all this to be real members of the true church of God. For it is not calling *hereticks* firſt, that proves them that do ſo to be no *hereticks*, or acquits them from the ſame or greater crimes, than thoſe which they are ſo forward to charge upon other men; nor will God condemn all thoſe who are excommunicated by men, and deny ſalvation to every one whom they ſhall pleaſe to ſeparate from their ſociety, and to call by ſome odious name. Men may be put out of the ſynagogue, and yet received into heaven; for the *judgment of God is* not according to the uncharitable cenſures of men, but *according to truth* and right.

The ſentence of *excommunication* is certainly very dreadful where it is duly inflicted; and next to the judgment of God, men ought to be afraid of juſtly incurring the danger of this cenſure; and it ought to be upon very plain and evident grounds that men either ſeparate themſelves, or endanger their being cut off from the communion of the church they live in: but when it once comes to this, that a church is infected with groſs errors and corruptions, plainly contrary to the word of God, eſpecially if that church will impoſe her errors upon all that are of her communion; then thoſe who refuſe to comply, do not *ſeparate themſelves*, but *are cut off*; do not *depart*, but *are driven out* of the communion of that church; and ſeparation in that caſe is as innocent and free from the guilt of *ſchiſm*, as the cauſe of it is; for the terms of communion are become ſuch, that thoſe who are convinced of thoſe errors and corruptions can have no ſalvation, if they continue in that communion, and then I am ſure their ſalvation will not be endangered by leaving it, or being excommunicated out of it; for that would be the hardeſt caſe in the world, that men ſhould be damned for continuing in the communion of ſuch a church, and damned likewiſe for being caſt out of it.

Therefore no man ought to be terrified, becauſe of the boldneſs and preſumption of thoſe, who with ſo much confidence, and ſo little charity, damn all that are not of their communion; for we ſee plainly from the *text*, that men may be in the right and ſureſt way to ſalvation, and yet be excommunicated by thoſe who call themſelves the true church, and will not allow ſalvation to any, but thoſe of their own communion. The diſciples of our Lord and Saviour were certainly very good men, and in a ſafe way of ſalvation, tho' they were excommunicated, and put out of the ſynagogue, by the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jewiſh church. I proceed to the

3d *Obſervation*, which was this, that from uncharitable cenſures, men do by an eaſy ſtep and almoſt naturally proceed to cruel actions. After the *Jews* had put the diſciples of our Lord out of their ſynagogues, and thereby concluded them to be *hereticks* and *reprobates*, no wonder they ſhould proceed to kill thoſe, whom they thought not worthy to live; *they ſhall put you out of their ſynagogues* (ſays our Saviour) and when they have done that, they will ſoon think it a thing not only fit and reaſonable, but pious and meritorious, and *a good piece of ſervice done to God, to put you to death.* Uncharitableneſs naturally draws on cruelty, and hardens human nature towards thoſe, of whom we have once conceived ſo ill an opinion, that they are enemies to God and his truth.

And this hath been the ſource of the moſt barbarous cruelties that have been in the world; witneſs the ſeverity of the heathen perſecution of the Chriſtians, which juſtified itſelf by the uncharitable opinion which they had conceived of them, that they were deſpiſers of religion and the Gods, and conſequently atheiſts; that they were pertinacious and obſtinate in their opinions, that is, in the modern ſtile, they were *hereticks.* And the like uncharitable conceit among Chriſtians hath been thought a ſufficient ground (even in the judgment of the *infallible chair*) for the juſtification of ſeveral bloody *maſſacres*, and the cruel proceedings of the *inquiſition* againſt perſons ſuſpected of hereſy; for after men are once ſentenced to eternal damnation, it ſeems a ſmall thing to torment and deſtroy their bodies.

4. Men may do the vileſt and moſt wicked things, not only under a *grave pretence* of religion, but out of *a real opinion and perſuaſion of mind*, that they do religiouſly. Murder is certainly one of the greateſt and moſt crying ſins; and yet our Saviour foretels, that the *Jews* ſhould put his diſciples to death, being *verily perſuaded* that in ſo doing they ſhould offer a moſt acceptable ſacrifice to God; *yea the time cometh, that whoſoever killeth you ſhall think that he offers a ſacrifice to God.*

Not but that the great duties and virtues of religion are very plain and eaſy to be underſtood; and ſo are the contrary ſins and vices: But then they are only plain to a teachable, and honeſt, and well-diſpoſed mind; to thoſe *who receive the word with meekneſs*, and are not blinded with wrath and furious zeal; to thoſe that *receive the truth into an honeſt heart*, and *entertain it in the love of it*; they are plain to the humble and meek; *for the humble God will guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways*; ſuch as *theſe* God ſeldom ſuffers to fall into fatal miſtakes about their ſin, or duty, ſo as *to call good evil, and evil good*; *to call light darkneſs, and darkneſs light*; to think uncharitableneſs a virtue, and downright murder a great duty.

But if men will give up themſelves to be ſwayed by ſelf-love and ſelf-conceit, to be governed by any baſe or corrupt intereſt, to be blinded by prejudice, and intoxicated by pride, to be tranſported and hurried away by violent and furious paſſions; no wonder if they miſtake the nature, and confound the differences of things, in the plaineſt and moſt palpable caſes; no wonder if *God give up* perſons of ſuch corrupt minds *to ſtrong delu-*

ſions to believe lies. It ought not to be ſtrange to us, if ſuch men bring their underſtandings to their wills and intereſts, and bend their judgments to their prejudices, make them ſtoop to their pride, and blindly to follow their paſſions, which way ſoever they lead them; for God uſually leaves ſuch perſons to themſelves, as run away from him, and is not concerned to ſecure thoſe from ſplitting upon the moſt dangerous rocks, who will ſteer their courſe by no compaſs, but commit themſelves to the wind and tide of their own luſts and paſſions.

In theſe caſes men may take the wrong way; and yet believe themſelves to be in the right; they may oppoſe the truth, and perſecute the profeſſors of it, and be guilty of the blackeſt crimes, and the moſt horrid impieties, malice and hatred, blaſphemy and murder; and yet all the while be *verily perſuaded*, that they are ſerving God, and ſacrificing to him.

Of this we have a plain and full inſtance in the Scribes and Phariſees, the chief prieſts and rulers among the *Jews*, who becauſe *they ſought the honour of men and not that which was from God, and loved the praiſe of men more than the praiſe of God*; becauſe they were prejudiced againſt the meanneſs of our Saviour's birth and condition, and had upon falſe grounds (though as they thought upon the infallibility of tradition, and of ſcripture interpreted by tradition) entertained quite other notions of the *Meſſias*, from what he really was to be; becauſe they were proud and thought themſelves too wiſe to learn of him; and becauſe his doctrine of humility, and ſelf-denial, did thwart their intereſt and bring down their authority and credit among the people; therefore they ſet themſelves againſt him with all their might, oppoſing his doctrine, and blaſting his reputation, and perſecuting him to the death; and all this while did bear up themſelves with a conceit of the *antiquity* and *privileges* of their church, and their profound knowledge in the law of God, and a great external ſhew of piety and devotion, and an arrogant pretence and uſurpation of being *the only church* and people of God in the world: and by virtue of theſe advantages, they thought they might do any thing; and that whoſoever oppoſed the authority of *ſo ancient and good a church*, muſt needs be very bad men, and deſerve to be proceeded againſt in the ſevereſt manner. As if any pretence of piety could give a privilege to do wickedly, and by how much the wiſer and holier any man took himſelf to be, he might do ſo much the worſe things.

There is another remarkable inſtance of this in St. *Paul*, who out of a blind and furious zeal for *the traditions of his fathers*, perſecuted the true church of God, by impriſonment and death, and all manner of cruelties; and all this while *he verily thought* that he was in the right, and *that he ought to do* all theſe *things againſt the name of Jeſus of Nazareth*. And if God had not in a miraculous manner check'd him in his courſe, and chang'd his mind, he would have ſpent his whole life in that courſe of perſecution and cruelty, and would (with Pope *Paul* IV. upon his death-bed) have recommended *the inquiſition* (or if he could have thought of any thing more ſevere) to the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jewiſh church.

I will not trouble you with nearer inſtances; though the Jewiſh church is not the only church in the world, that hath countenanced the deſtruction and extirpation of thoſe who differ from them, as a piece of very acceptable ſervice to God, and meritorious of the pardon of their ſins.

5. I obſerve that ſuch actions as theſe are never the leſs horribly wicked and impious, notwithſtanding the good mind with which, and the good end for which they are done. The *Jews* were not excuſed from the guilt of perſecution and murder, for all they thought they did well in killing the diſciples of our Lord.

For to make an action good and acceptable to God, the goodneſs of all cauſes, and of all circumſtances, muſt concur; and any one defect in any of theſe, does vitiate the whole action, and ſpoil the goodneſs of it. We muſt do it with a good mind, being verily perſuaded that what we do is good and acceptable to God; in which ſenſe St. *Paul* ſaith, *whatever is not of faith is ſin*; and we muſt do it for a good end, for the honour of God, and the ſervice of religion, and the benefit and edification of men. But there is one thing wanting yet, which is often forgotten, but is mainly conſiderable, *viz.* what we do with a good mind, and to a good end, muſt be good and lawful in itſelf, commanded or allowed, or at leaſt not forbidden by God: If it be; what good circumſtances ſoever may belong to the action, the whole action is ſtark naught; becauſe the very matter and ſubſtance of it is evil, and unlawful, and damnable, though done for never ſo good an end. So St. *Paul* tells us, that they *who ſay they might do evil, that good might come, their damnation was juſt.* He tells us indeed, that ſome would have charged this doctrine upon the Chriſtians, and particularly upon himſelf; but he rejects it with the greateſt deteſtation; and (which is not unworthy our obſervation) in his epiſtle to the *Roman* church, as if the Spirit of God, to whom all times are preſent, had particularly directed him to give this caution to *that church*, that in future ages they might be warned againſt ſo pernicious a principle, and all wicked practices that are conſequent upon it.

And we find that St. *Paul*, after his converſion, did think it no ſufficient plea and excuſe for himſelf, and his perſecution of the chriſtian profeſſion, that what he did was out of zeal for God, and his true religion, as *he was verily perſuaded*; but, notwithſtanding that, acknowledgeth himſelf *a murderer*, and *one of the greateſt ſinners*; for which, without *the great mercy of God*, he had periſhed everlaſtingly.

6. And *laſtly*, I obſerve, that the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt. Religion is certainly the higheſt accompliſhment and perfection of human nature; and zeal for God and his truth an excellent quality, and highly acceptable to God: And yet nothing is more barbarous, and ſpurs men on to more horrid impieties, than a blind zeal for God, and falſe and miſtaken principles in the matter of religion.

Our Saviour compares the chriſtian religion, and the miniſters and profeſſors of it, to ſalt and light, the moſt uſeful and delightful things in the world. Religion enlightens the minds of men, and directs them in the way wherein they ſhould go; it ſeaſons the ſpirits and manners of men, and preſerves them from being putrified and corrupted; but *if the ſalt loſe its ſavour*, if that which ſhould ſeaſon other things, be tainted itſelf; *it is thenceforth* the moſt inſipid and offenſive thing in the world, *good for nothing, but to be caſt upon the dunghil: if the light that is in us be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs?*

Miſtakes and falſe principles are no where ſo pernicious, and of ſuch miſchievous conſequence, as in religion. A blind and miſguided zeal in religion is enough to ſpoil the beſt nature and diſpoſition in the world. St. *Paul* (for ought appears) was of himſelf of a very kind and compaſſionate nature; and yet what *a fury* did his miſtaken zeal make him! It is hardly credible how madly he laid about him, but that he himſelf gives us the account of it, *Acts* xxvi. 9, 10, 11. *I verily thought with myſelf* (ſays he) *that I ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jeſus of Nazareth; which thing I alſo did in Jeruſalem, and many of the ſaints I ſhut up in priſon, having received authority from the chief prieſts. And when they were put to death, I gave my voice againſt them; and I puniſhed them oft in every ſynagogue, and compelled them to blaſpheme, and being exceedingly mad againſt them, I perſecuted them, even to ſtrange cities.*

I might deſcend lower, and give inſtances both of former and latter times, of emperors and princes, both heathen and chriſtian, that of themſelves were mild and gentle; and yet through a miſtaken zeal, and the inſtigation of the chief prieſts, have been carried to cruel and bloody things. And indeed nothing gives ſo keen an edge, even to the mildeſt tempers, as an erroneous and wild zeal for God and religion; it is like quick-ſilver in the back of a ſword that is not very ſharp of itſelf, which gives a mighty force and weight to its blow, and makes it cut terribly.

And it is very ſad to conſider, that the zealous proſecution of miſtakes in religion, hath produced ſadder and more barbarous effects in the world, and more frequently, than the ordinary corruptions and degeneracy of natural light is apt to do; as the decay of the richeſt and moſt generous wines makes the ſoureſt vinegar; ſo that the paſquil or libel againſt pope *Urban* VIII. upon occaſion of his taking off the brazen roof of the old capitol (which had held out ſo many ages, and that notwithſtanding *Rome* had been ſo often ſack'd by barbarous nations) and his ſelling it to enrich his family [*quod non fecerant Barbari, fecerunt Barberini*] may, with changing the name and occaſion, be applied to a great many others; that they have been guilty of thoſe cruelties againſt Chriſtians, upon account of difference in religion which the moſt barbarous nations never exerciſed upon one another.

I have done with *the obſervations* and the *text*; and ſhall I now need to make any *application* of what hath been ſaid, to the occaſion of *this day?* The thing applies itſelf; ſince *the horrid deſign of this day* was undertaken and carried on upon the ſame pretences and principles, upon which the *Jews* perſecuted the diſciples of our Lord, and much in the ſame method; for the firſt thundered out an *excommunication* againſt them, and then took it for granted, that it would be *an acceptable ſacrifice to God, to deſtroy them.*

I will not go about to aggravate *the conſpiracy of this day*, it is paſt my skill; nor will I extend the blame and guilt of it any farther than the plain evidence and reaſon of the thing does enforce. It is a thing ſo ſcandalous to *human nature*, and ſo great a reflection upon any *church* and *religion*, to be acceſſary to the contriving or countenancing of any *ſuch deſign*, that I am very well contented, that it ſhould be confined to as narrow a compaſs as may be, and none eſteemed guilty of it, but thoſe that were openly in it, or have ſince endeavoured to excuſe it. All that we deſire of *others*, is that they would declare their hearty deteſtation of ſuch abominable practices, and be as good as their word, and that they would not account it *a ſervice and ſacrifice to God*, to deſtroy all that cannot be of their mind.

So that the *inference* from all this diſcourſe, in ſhort, ſhall be this, that men ſhould take great care to inform their conſciences aright, and to govern them by the plain rules of good and evil, the law of God written upon our hearts, and revealed in his word, which forbids ſuch practices as I have been ſpeaking of, as clearly as the ſun ſhines at noon-day; and that we would always be afraid to do a bad thing, though gilded over with never ſo glorious colours, and ſpecious pretences of zeal for God and his truth. For a man may do a thing with an honeſt mind, and for a religious end, and be commiſſioned and countenanced (as St. *Paul* was) by them who take themſelves to be *the only true church* in the world; and yet at laſt prove to have been all the while *a blaſphemer*, and *a murderer*, and *the greateſt of ſinners*; for none of theſe pretences are ſufficient to warrant and ſanctify a wicked action: Before this can be done, the immutable nature of good and evil muſt be changed.

I will conclude all with that gentle reproof of our bleſſed Saviour to his diſciples, when their zeal for him had tranſported them to make that cruel requeſt to him, that he would (as *Elias* had done upon a like occaſion) *call for fire from heaven to deſtroy the Samaritans: Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of; for the Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them*; hereby declaring to us the true temper and ſpirit of chriſtianity, and that they that act contrary to it, are ignorant of the nature of the chriſtian religion; *ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of; for the Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them.*

SERMON XXX.

Preach'd on the 29th of May, 1693.

The Duty and Reaſon of praying for Governors.

1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

I exhort therefore, that firſt of all, ſupplications, prayers, interceſſions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godlineſs and honeſty.

I Need not tell any here, that *this day* is appointed by authority for an *anniverſary ſolemnity*, in a grateful commemoration of the great mercy of God to theſe nations in putting an end to the inteſtine wars and confuſions of many years, in reſtoring to us our own ancient government and laws, and in bringing home, as upon *this day*, the rightful heir of theſe kingdoms, to the crown and throne of his fathers: And tho' the glory of *this day* hath been not a little ſullied and obſcured by many things which have happen'd ſince that time, fitter now to be buried in ſilence and oblivion, than to be mentioned and raked up; yet it hath pleaſed God in ſcattering thoſe black clouds, which not long ſince hung over us, to reſtore *this day* to its firſt luſtre and brightneſs; ſo that we may now with great joy look back upon it, as deſigned by the wiſe providence of God, to make way for the happineſs which we now enjoy under *their preſent majeſties*, by whom, under God, we have been deliver'd from that terrible and imminent danger which threatned our *religion* and *laws*, and the very *conſtitution* itſelf of our *ancient government*. And to this occaſion, no kind of argument can be more proper and ſuitable, than that which the *text* affords to our conſideration, in this injunction of St. *Paul* to *Timothy*, to take care that in the publick worſhip of God, *ſupplications* and *thankſgivings* be put up to God, *for kings, and all that are in authority. I exhort therefore*, &c.

In which words there are *four* things conſiderable.

Firſt, The duty here enjoined, which is prayer; expreſſed to us in ſeveral words, which ſeem to denote the ſeveral kinds or parts of prayer; *I exhort therefore, that ſupplications, prayers, interceſſions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: For kings, and for all that are in authority*, &c. Some of theſe words are of a very near ſignification; and yet there ſeems ſome difference betwixt them, moſt probably this:

1. By δεήσεις, which we render *ſupplications*, is probably meant that part or kind of prayer, wherein we ſupplicate God for the pardon of our ſins, and for the averting and removing of evils, whether temporal or ſpiritual, from ourſelves or others.

2. By προσευχὰς, which we render *prayers*, ſeem to be meant petitions for bleſſings and good things from God; and theſe are moſt properly called *prayers*.

3. By ἐντεύξεις ſeems to be particularly meant pleadings and *interceſſions* on the behalf of others.

4. By εὐχαριστίας is certainly intended praiſes and *thankſgivings* to God, for his bleſſings and goodneſs to ourſelves and others. This ſeems to be the difference between them, which whether it be exactly ſo or not, is not very material, ſince theſe are unqueſtionably the ſeveral kinds or parts of prayer. All theſe ſeveral ſorts of prayer, St. *Chryſoſtom*, in his comment upon this *text*, tells us were publickly uſed in his time, in the daily ſervice of the church; "this (ſays he) all communicants do know is done "every day, morning and evening; how that we pray for all the world, *for kings* "*and all that are in authority*."

Secondly, for whom we are to pray; in general, *for all men*. Our prayers are one of the greateſt and beſt expreſſions of our charity, and therefore ought to be as large and extenſive as our charity is. We are bound in common charity to love all men, and to wiſh well to them; but our bare wiſhes ſignify nothing, unleſs we direct them to God, who is able to confer upon them the bleſſings and good things which we wiſh to them.

And this is a charity which God hath put into every man's power, and which the pooreſt man in the world, as well as the richeſt, is capable of exerciſing at all times and upon all occaſions: For *the ear of God is open to the prayers* of the poor, as well as of the rich, and they are every whit as prevalent with him; nay, the ſcripture ſeems to ſay, that God hath a more particular regard to the prayers of *the poor*. So that we may be liberal and bountiful in our prayers to thoſe, to whom we are able to give nothing elſe; and when our hands cannot reach to relieve them, we may pour out our hearts to God for them; we may pray for their ſpiritual and temporal good, and we may praiſe God for the good which befalls them, though it was out of our power to be any ways inſtrumental to procure it for them.

Thirdly, For whom we are more eſpecially, and in the firſt place, to pray; *viz.* for thoſe who have the greateſt and moſt publick influence of all others, upon the peace and happineſs of mankind, *for kings, and for all that are in authority*; that is, for the ſupreme magiſtrate, and for all inferior magiſtrates, who derive their power and authority from the ſupreme.

Government is neceſſary to the welfare of mankind, becauſe it is the great band of human ſociety, the guard of its peace, and the ſecurity of every man's perſon and property; and therefore we are concerned as much as is poſſible, both to pray for our governors, and to bleſs God for them; becauſe without them we ſhould be in a moſt wretched condition. Mankind would be unavoidably miſerable without government; human ſociety would preſently diſband, and all things would run into confuſion. It is a remakable ſaying of one of the Jewiſh maſters, *pray for the happineſs of the kingdom or government; for if it were not for the fear of that, men would devour one another alive.*

alive. And *Joſephus* tells us, that *when the Jews were made ſubject to the Romans* (tho' it was by conqueſt) *twice a day they offered up ſacrifices for the life and ſafety of the emperor.* And this was very agreeable to what God had commanded that people by his prophet, in a much like caſe, when the *Jews* were conquered by the king of *Babylon*, and carried away captives, *Jer.* xxix. 7. *Seek the peace of the city whither I have cauſed you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof ſhall ye have peace.* And ſurely the reaſon is much ſtronger, why we ſhould pray for our *natural* princes and governors. I come now to the

Fourth and *laſt* thing conſidered in *the text*, and which I principally deſign to ſpeak to, namely the reaſon or argument which the Apoſtle uſes, to engage us to pray for our princes, and for all that are in authority, *that we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godlineſs and honeſty.* The manifold benefits and advantages which redound to us from our governors, is a ſufficient argument why we ſhould pray to God for them, and praiſe him likewiſe for ſo great a bleſſing, and that in the firſt place; *I exhort therefore firſt of all* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *&c.* Now the Apoſtle here in the *text* expreſſeth *two* great advantages of government, which upon the matter do comprehend all the reſt.

1. That by government we are ſecured in our civil rights and intereſts, in the quiet and peaceable poſſeſſion of what is our own.

2. That we may thereby be protected in the free practice and exerciſe of religion and virtue.

Theſe are the *two* greateſt and moſt deſirable things to man; and neither of theſe can be had without government. I ſhall briefly conſider theſe two particulars, and then endeavour to ſhew, what obligation the conſideration of them lays upon us, both to pray to God in the behalf of our princes and governors, and likewiſe to praiſe God for them: And then I ſhall conclude all with a brief *application* of this whole diſcourſe to the ſolemn occaſion of *this day*.

Firſt, I ſhall begin with the benefits and advantages of government mentioned in the *text*, namely, theſe *two*.

1. That by it we are ſecured in our civil rights and intereſts, in the quiet and peaceable poſſeſſion of what is our own.

Without government there could be no ſuch thing as property in any thing beyond our own perſons; for nothing but laws can make property, and laws are the effect of government and authority: Nay, without government, we have no ſecurity of our perſons and lives, much leſs of any thing that belongs to us, and is at preſent in our poſſeſſion. Were we not protected by laws (which are the effect of government) we could have no ſafety, no quiet enjoyment of any thing; but every man muſt be perpetually upon his guard againſt all the world, and expoſed to continual violence and injuries from thoſe, who are too many, and too ſtrong for him; ſo that all our quiet and ſecurity from fear and danger, from the fraud and oppreſſion of thoſe who are more crafty and powerful than ourſelves, from endleſs confuſions and diſtractions, and from a ſtate of perpetual feud and war with all mankind, is entirely due and owing to civil government.

And this alone is ſo unſpeakable a benefit, that without it, *men*, of all creatures, would be the moſt miſerable; becauſe all that wit and ſagacity, all that cunning and contrivance, which mankind hath above the brute creatures, would but enable them to do ſo much the more miſchief to one another, and to deviſe and find out more powerful and effectual means and inſtruments to harm and deſtroy one another.

In ſhort, that we live, and that we live well, in any tolerable condition either of ſafety or plenty, and that we are able to call any thing our own for one day, or for one hour; that we are not in perpetual terror and apprehenſion of mortal dangers, and that we are at any time free from the invaſion of what we at preſent poſſeſs, by the fraud and force of others, is ſolely the effect of this great bleſſing and divine appointment of government, to preſerve the peace of human ſociety, and by wiſe and wholſom laws, to tie up mens hands from mutual injuries and violence. Upon this all the comfort and all the ſecurity of human laws does depend. From hence it comes to paſs (that as the ſcripture expreſſeth it) *we may ſit down every man under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, and that there ſhall be none to make us afraid.* So that if ſecurity is neceſſary to the comfort and happineſs of mankind; then government is ſo too: For without this, the ſocieties of men would preſently diſſolve and fall in pieces, and all things would run into confuſion and diſorder.

2. Another great benefit which may reaſonably be expected from government (though it does not always ſo happen) is, that men are protected by it, in the free exerciſe and practice of religion and virtue. Therefore we ſhould *pray for kings, and for all that are in authority* (ſays the Apoſtle) *that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godlineſs and honeſty*; that is, in the practice of piety and devotion towards God; of ſobriety and temperance in regard to ourſelves; and of juſtice and charity toward all men.

It's true indeed (and ſo the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians found it by experience) that the edge and authority of laws may be, and ſometimes is turned upon the true religion, and the ſincere profeſſors of it: But even then, though good men may receive great harms and injuries from perſecuting princes and governors; (as the primitive Chriſtians did from ſeveral of the *Roman* emperors) yet then it ſo happens, that good men have ſome conſiderable benefit and protection from the civil government and laws, being for the moſt part preſerved from the fury and rage of the multitude; ſo that though particular perſons undergo the trial of cruel ſufferings, yet much greater numbers do eſcape and are preſerved.

And which is very conſiderable in this matter, againſt ſeveral of the main and eſſential parts of religion, there never were any human laws made; as againſt inward love, honour, and reverence of Almighty God, and the worſhipping him in our hearts, and in ſecret; of this part of religion, human laws can make no cognizance: Nay, farther yet, againſt humility and meekneſs, againſt modeſty and patience, againſt temperance and chaſtity, againſt peaceableneſs and obedience to government, againſt juſtice and gratitude, againſt charity and forgiveneſs of injuries, *againſt theſe* and ſuch like virtues, the Apoſtle has told us, *there is no law*. Againſt the practice of theſe (without ſome of which government could not poſſibly ſubſiſt) no perſecution was ever raiſed, no not by the worſt of governors! on the contrary, in the practice of theſe virtues, good men have been in all ages and times protected by law.

'Tis true indeed, that good men have many times been grievouſly perſecuted by the civil government and authority, *for the external profeſſion of revealed religion*; which was the caſe of the Chriſtians at that time, when the Apoſtle commanded them *to pray for kings and for all that were in authority*; *that under their protection, they might lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godlineſs and honeſty*. St. *Paul* knew very well, when he gave this injunction to them, *that ſupplications and prayers be made for kings, and for all that are in authority*, that the powers of the world did not at that time favour chriſtianity: But he knew likewiſe, that government was neceſſary to the happineſs of mankind, and that Chriſtians, even in that ſtate of perſecution, did enjoy many conſiderable benefits and advantages by it, ſo that they were not perpetually expoſed to popular rage and cruelty, and the violence of *wicked and unreaſonable men*; which would not only have *hindred the progreſs* of chriſtianity, but would in a ſhort time have endangered *the extinguiſhing* of it. Beſides, that by the favour and protection of government, the Chriſtians had many conſiderable intervals of peace and eaſe, which gave chriſtianity a breathing-time, and opportunity to recover itſelf; and though the ſecular authority did for a long time diſcountenance chriſtianity, and keep it under hatches; that was but an accidental effect and abuſe of government, and obedience was ſtill due, and prayers for it ſo much the more neceſſary, yea and thankſgivings to God for it very reaſonable, upon account of the common benefits and advantages of it to human ſociety.

Beſides that Chriſtians did hope and believe, that the civil government might in time be gained, to give its countenance and aſſiſtance to chriſtianity, and that *kings and princes might become nurſing fathers to the church*, as was expreſly foretold by the prophets, and afterwards in God's due time was remarkably accompliſhed. In the mean time Chriſtians were patiently to obey and ſuffer, in expectation of thoſe glorious rewards in another world, which were promiſed to their faith and patience; and to pray for the powers that perſecuted them, that *they* alſo *might be brought to the acknowledgment of the truth*, and might uſe that power which God had committed to them, for the protection of truth and innocency, and for the continuance and ſupport of the true religion; which, bleſſed be God, was afterwards the caſe of chriſtianity for ſeveral ages. I proceed in the

Second place, to ſhew what obligation the conſideration of the mighty benefits and advantages of government lays upon us, both to pray to God on the behalf of princes and governors, and likewiſe to praiſe God for them.

Becauſe in their welfare and proſperity the publick peace and happineſs doth chiefly conſiſt, and in the publick good conſiſts the good of particular perſons; and above all the piety and goodneſs of princes and magiſtrates (eſpecially thoſe who are in the higheſt place of authority) have a general good influence upon the manners of men, both for the diſcountenancing of wickedneſs and vice, and for the encouragement of religion and virtue, which are the main pillars and foundation of publick peace and proſperity. *A king ſitting in the throne of judgment* (ſaith *Solomon*, Prov. xx. 8.) *ſcattereth away all evil with his eyes.* The pattern of a religious and good prince is *a living law* to his ſubjects, and more than the example of ten thouſand others, to mould and faſhion the manners of the people to a conformity to it.

Beſides that there is (as one expreſſeth it) a kind of *moral* connexion and communication of evil and of guilt betwixt princes and people, ſo that they are many times mutually rewarded for the virtues and good actions, and puniſhed for the ſins and faults of one another. Of which proceedings of the divine juſtice towards the people of *Iſrael*, there are many remarkable inſtances in ſcripture, where God rewarded the piety of good princes with great bleſſings upon their people, and puniſhed the perſonal faults of their kings with publick judgments upon the whole nation. So that in truth it is the greateſt kindneſs and charity to ourſelves, to pray for our princes and governors; becauſe *our* welfare is involved in *theirs*, and we ſuffer not only in all the misfortunes and calamities which befal them, but many times upon account of their perſonal faults and miſcarriages. *Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi*, the extravagances of princes are puniſhed in the misfortunes of their ſubjects. Thus *David* (otherwiſe a very good king) ſinned in numbering the people, and the plague fell upon *them*; he was puniſhed in the calamity of his people. And this was in no wiſe unjuſt, becauſe there are alway ſins enough in any nation to deſerve puniſhment, and God may take what occaſion he pleaſes, to ſend his judgments upon them that deſerve them; for princes and people make but one civil and political body, and what part of it ſoever is puniſhed, the other ſuffers. And this is the true ground and reaſon of the communication of puniſhments betwixt princes and people.

Another conſideration which ſhould engage us *to pray for thoſe that are in authority*, is, that we reap the great benefit of their care, and pains and vigilancy for us, *under their ſhadow we are ſafe.* Our innocency and our rights are protected by their power and laws, and by the juſt puniſhments which they inflict upon evil-doers, and upon thoſe who go about to violate our rights in any kind; ſo that we ought to pray and to praiſe God for them, as our great *benefactors*, and the chief inſtruments of our ſecurity and welfare; and therefore not only in *duty*, but in *juſtice* and *gratitude*, we are bound to wiſh all good to them, and to intercede with God for them, for the peace and proſperity of their government, and to bleſs God on their behalf: Yea, we ought to do this out of love to ourſelves; becauſe *their* good and proſperity is *ours*, *their* goodneſs and righteouſneſs, *their* perſonal piety and virtues extend to *us*, and have a mighty influence upon us, to excite and encourage us to follow their good example, and *to go and do likewiſe.*

And we ought likewiſe to do this out of charity and compaſſion to our princes and governors, whoſe condition is in truth rather to be pitied than envied, and whoſe high place and dignity is much more to be dreaded than deſired by a wiſe man, conſidering how heavy a burden they ſuſtain, what dangers they are continually expoſed to, what cares and troubles, and cenſures they daily undergo, for our ſafety and eaſe. So that whatever ambitious and inconſiderate men may *think*, wiſe men do certainly *know* and find by experience, that to diſcharge with care and faithfulneſs all the parts of a good governor, is a very difficult and troubleſome province. Inferior magiſtrates find care and trouble enough, in that ſmall ſhare and part of it which they ſuſtain; and if ſo, then certainly the care and concernment of *the whole*, muſt needs be a heavy burden indeed; and what abilities are ſufficient for it, what ſhoulders are ſtrong enough to ſtand under it?

And as upon this account they have the greateſt need of our prayers, for God's direction and aſſiſtance in the diſcharge of their high office, ſo likewiſe for his powerful grace to preſerve them from ſin and evil, in the midſt of thoſe manifold temptations to which they are continually expoſed, in appearance much beyond other men, from the height of their condition, and the extent of their power, which are ſtrong temptations to weak minds, to pride and inſolency, to injuſtice and oppreſſion; from the abundance of all things, which miniſter to luxury and exceſs, and from the officious ſervility of *paraſites* and *flatterers*, who ſooth them in their faults, and humour them in their paſſions, and comply with their corrupt and vicious inclinations, and are always ready at hand, and forward inſtruments to execute their commands, and to ſerve their luſts and vices.

And as princes greatly need our prayers upon theſe accounts: ſo it is juſt matter of praiſe and thankfulneſs to God, when a nation hath wiſe, juſt, and good princes, who lay to heart the intereſt of their people, and endeavour by all the wiſe methods and honeſt arts of government, effectually to procure it; who by their authority and due execution of the law, do diſcountenance, and, as much as in them lies, reſtrain wickedneſs and vice; and by their own example encourage virtue and piety in their ſubjects; and thereby invite, and even provoke them to the like practices: the life of a good prince is a kind of *publick cenſure* of ill manners, and reproof of wicked practices. And I do not know whether there be a more delightful ſight on this ſide heaven, than to ſee thoſe who are in eminent place and power, even if they might do whatever they would, yet continually chooſing to do what they ought; as if their power were ſo far from being a temptation to them to do evil, that on the contrary, the conſideration of it is one of the beſt and ſtrongeſt arguments to reſtrain them from it.

Weak minds are apt to meaſure their *liberty* by their *power*, and to think that the higher and greater they are, ſo much the greater privilege they have to be more extravagantly bad than others: But if the matter be really conſidered, the argument runs the other way; and he that reaſons wiſely, will certainly conclude with *Tully*, *in maximâ quâque fortunâ minimum licere*, *that they who are in the higheſt ſtation, and greateſt power, have of all others the leaſt liberty to do what they liſt.* Their power, ſuppoſing it never ſo uncontrolable, and unaccountable, would be ſo far from being in reaſon a temptation to them to do what they ought not, that in truth it would ſet them above the temptation of doing any ill thing; becauſe they would ſtand in awe of no body, and there would be nothing that could hinder them from doing what is beſt, if they had a mind to it: and every one ought to have ſuch a mind: and nothing can be more misbecoming, and more directly contrary to the nature of their office, and the power wherewith they are intruſted, than to give an example of breaking thoſe laws, which they are to ſee put in execution.

God himſelf, becauſe he hath *all power*, is therefore *all goodneſs*, and is therefore *holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works*, according to the reaſoning of the author of the book of *wiſdom*, who argues thus with God, *It is not* (ſays he) *agreeable with thy power to condemn him that hath not deſerved to be puniſhed*; that is, it is not agreeable with infinite power, to do any thing that is unjuſt; *for thy power* (ſaith he to God) *is the beginning of righteouſneſs, and becauſe thou art the Lord of all, it maketh thee to be gracious unto all.* Infinite power is the foundation and principle of goodneſs and righteouſneſs, and all-powerful being is good and righteous, not only from *choice*, but from *a neceſſity of nature*.

And this is the true ground and reaſon of *that ſaying* of St. *James*, that *God cannot be tempted with evil*, becauſe his infinite power ſets him above all temptation to it: For what reaſon can be imagined, why he that hath all power, ſhall have any inclination to be otherwiſe than good? What can tempt him thereto? Since he that hath all power can neither have any hopes of being greater than he is, nor any fear of becoming leſs: and all temptation is founded either in hope or fear, and where neither of theſe can have any place, there can be no occaſion, no poſſible motive or temptation to evil; for *to be evil*, and *to do evil*, is always an effect of *weakneſs* and *want of power*.

The ſum of what I have ſaid upon this argument, and the deſign indeed of it, is to ſhew, that the greater power and authority any one hath, the leſs liberty he hath to do any thing that is bad. And I have been the larger upon this, becauſe I would fain imprint upon the minds of perſons, whom the providence of God hath inveſted with great power and authority, that as they have great opportunities of doing more good than others, ſo they have greater reaſon, and more advantages of doing it, and are more inexcuſable if they do any thing that is bad; not only becauſe their actions are of a more publick influence and obſervation; but becauſe their temptations to evil, how great ſoever they may ſeem to be, are in truth and reality much leſs than other mens. Happy are thoſe princes, that wiſely conſider this, and make their power and authority over others, an argument to be ſo much better themſelves, and to do ſo much more good to others; and becauſe they are leſs ſubject to *the coercive power of law*, do for that reaſon think themſelves ſo much the more obliged to be *a law to themſelves*. Bleſſed be God for the happineſs which we enjoy in this reſpect; and let us earneſtly beſeech him that he would be pleaſed to beſtow ſuch a plentiful meaſure of his grace and holy Spirit on our moſt gracious king and queen, as may effectually both engage and enable them to uſe their power to the beſt purpoſes for *the publick good*.

And thus I have briefly gone over, and explained to you the ſeveral particulars in the *text: the duty of prayer* here enjoined; *for whom* we are to pray, in general *for all men*; and for whom more eſpecially, and *in the firſt place*; *for kings, and all that are in authority*; *and upon what conſiderations* we are to pray for them; and to praiſe God in their behalf; becauſe of the great benefits we receive by them; and becauſe both in reſpect of the dangers and difficulties of their condition, they ſtand in need of our prayers above other men; beſides that in praying for their welfare and proſperity, we pray for our own peace and happineſs.

And now to *apply* this to ourſelves, and to the occaſion of *this day*. By all that hath been ſaid, we cannot but be convinced what cauſe we have to bleſs God for *that happy government* which we live under, *that excellent conſtitution*, under the gentle influences whereof *we* enjoy more liberty, more plenty, and more ſecurity from all manner of injury and oppreſſion, than *any nation* this day on the face of the earth. Therefore with what thankfulneſs ſhould we *this day* commemorate the happy reſtoration of this government to us, after the miſerable diſtractions and confuſions of twenty years, by the reſtoration and return of our baniſhed *ſovereign*, in ſo peaceable, and yet ſo wonderful a manner, that a remembrance of it, even at this diſtance, is almoſt ſtill matter of amazement to us!

Bleſſed be the Lord God of Iſrael, who alone doth wondrous things.

And with our joyful praiſes, let us join our moſt devout and fervent prayers to almighty God, *for the king's and queen's majeſties, and for all that are in authority.* And I may truly ſay, that there was hardly ever greater reaſon and occaſion for it from both our diſtractions at home, and our dangers from abroad; never was there greater need of our earneſt ſupplications and prayers, than at *this* time, when our armies and fleets are in motion, and when God ſeems already to have given us ſome earneſt of good ſucceſs; bleſſed be his great and glorious name.

We have indeed a great army, and a more powerful fleet, than ever this nation ſent forth; but unleſs God be on our ſide, and favour our cauſe, in vain are all our preparations; for whenever his providence is pleaſed to interpoſe, *by ſtrength ſhall no man prevail*. Have we not reaſon then to *cry mightily unto God*, when the only ſtrength of the nation is at ſtake, when our ſins and provocations are ſo many and great, and there lies ſo heavy a load of guilt upon us? When the perſon of his ſacred majeſty is expoſed to ſo much hazard, not only *in the high places of the field*, but from the *reſtleſs attempts* of the malicious and implacable enemies of our peace and religion, *that he would be graciouſly pleaſed to go forth with our armies and fleets*, and *not remember our iniquities againſt us, but ſave us for his mercies ſake?*

We are too apt to murmur and complain of miſcarriages, and the ill management of affairs; but ſurely the beſt thing we can do, and that which beſt becomes us, is to look forward, and to turn our cenſures of our governors and their actions, into humble ſupplications to God in their behalf, and in behalf of the whole nation; *that he would be pleaſed to turn us every one from the evil of our ways, that he may return to us, and have mercy on us, that ſo iniquity may not be our ruin; that he may rejoice over us to do us good, and may at laſt think thoughts of peace towards us, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give us an expected end of our troubles.*

Let us then betake ourſelves to the proper work of *this day*, hearty *prayers* and *thankſgivings to almighty God, for the king and queen, and for all that are in authority; that as he hath been pleaſed by a wonderful providence to reſcue us from the imminent danger we were in, and from all our fears, by the happy advancement of their majeſties to the throne of theſe kingdoms; ſo he would of his infinite goodneſs ſtill preſerve and continue to us* this light of our eyes, and breath of our noſtrils, *princes of that great clemency and goodneſs, which render them the true repreſentatives of God upon earth, and the moſt gracious governors of men.*

And let us earneſtly beſeech him, *that he would confirm and ſtrengthen them in all goodneſs, and make them wiſe as angels of God, to diſcern betwixt good and evil, that they may know how to go in and out before this great people; that he would* *give them the united affections of their people, and a heart to ſtudy and ſeek their good all the days of their lives.*

And finally, *That he would be pleaſed to continue ſo great a bleſſing to us, and to grant them a long and proſperous reign over us; and that their poſterity in this royal family may endure for ever,* and their throne as the days of heaven; *that under them the people of theſe nations, we and the generations to come,* may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godlineſs and honeſty; *for his mercies ſake in Jeſus Chriſt,* who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; *to whom with the Father and the holy Ghoſt be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever.* Amen.

Preach'd in the Chapel of Lambeth-Houſe *on* Chriſtmas-Day, 1691.

SERMON XXXI.

The Love of God to Men in the incarnation of Chriſt.

1 John iv. 9.

In this was manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe that God ſent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

These words contain a clear and evident demonſtration of the love of God to us; *in this was manifeſted the love of God towards us;* that is, by this it plainly appears, that God had a mighty love for us, *that he ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* In which we may conſider this threefold evidence of God's love to mankind.

I. That he ſhould be pleaſed to take our caſe into conſideration, and to concern himſelf for our happineſs.

II. That he ſhould deſign ſo great a benefit to us, which is here expreſt by life; *that we might live through him.*

III. That he was pleaſed to uſe ſuch a means for the obtaining and procuring of this benefit for us; *he ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* Each of theſe ſingly is a great evidence of God's love to us; much more all of them together.

I. It is a great evidence of the love of God to mankind, that he was pleaſed to take our caſe into conſideration, and to concern himſelf for our happineſs. Nothing does more commend an act of kindneſs, than if there be great condeſcenſion in it. We uſe to value a ſmall favour, if it be done to us by one that is far above us, more than a far greater done to us by a mean and inconſiderable perſon. This made *David* to break out into ſuch admiration, when he conſidered the ordinary providence of God towards mankind. *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him! or the Son of man, that thou ſhouldſt conſider him!* This is a wonderful condeſcenſion indeed, for *God* to be mindful of *man.*

At the beſt we are but his creatures, and upon that very account at an infinite diſtance from him; ſo that were not he infinitely good, he would not be concerned for us, who are ſo infinitely beneath the conſideration of his love and pity. Neither are we of the higheſt rank of creatures; we are much below the Angels, as to the excellency and perfection of our beings; ſo that if God had not had a peculiar pity and regard to the ſons of men, he might have placed his affection and care upon a much nobler order of creatures, than we are, and ſo much the more miſerable, becauſe they fell from a higher ſtep of happineſs, I mean the loſt Angels; but yet for reaſons beſt known to his infinite wiſdom, God paſſed by them, and was pleaſed to conſider *us.* This the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* takes notice of, as an argument of God's peculiar and extraordinary love to mankind, that *he ſent his Son, not to take upon him the nature of Angels, but of the ſeed of Abraham.*

Now that *he*, who is far above us, and after that we by wilful tranſgreſſion had loſt ourſelves, had no obligation to take care of us, but what his own goodneſs laid upon him, that he ſhould concern himſelf ſo much for us, and be ſo ſolicitous for our recovery, this is a great evidence of his kindneſs and good-will to us, and cannot be imagined to proceed from any other cauſe.

II. Another evidence of God's great love to us, is, that he was pleaſed to deſign ſo great a benefit for us. This the ſcripture expreſſeth to us by *life*; and it is uſual in ſcripture to expreſs the beſt and moſt deſirable things by *life*; becauſe as it is one of the greateſt bleſſings, ſo it is the foundation of all other enjoyments: And therefore the Apoſtle uſeth but this one word to expreſs to us all the bleſſings and benefits of Chriſt's coming into the world; *God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*

And this expreſſion is very proper to our caſe; becauſe *life* ſignifies the reparation of all that which was loſt by the fall of man. For man by his wilful degeneracy and apoſtaſy from God, is ſunk into a ſtate of ſin and miſery, both which the ſcripture is wont to expreſs by *death*. In reſpect of our ſinful ſtate we are ſpiritually dead; and in reſpect of the puniſhment and miſery due to us for our ſins, we are judicially dead, dead in law; for *the wages of ſin is death.* Now God hath ſent his Son into the world, that in both theſe reſpects *we might live through him.*

1. We were ſpiritually dead, dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Eph.* ii. 1, 2. *You hath he quickened, who were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, wherein in times paſt ye walked, according to the courſe of this world.* Every wicked man, though in a natural ſenſe he be alive, yet in a moral ſenſe he is dead. So the Apoſtle ſpeaking of thoſe *who live in ſinful luſts and pleaſures*, ſays of them that *they are dead while they live*, 1 Tim. v. 6. What corrupt humours are to the body, that ſin is to the ſoul, their diſeaſe and their death. Now God ſent his Son to deliver us from this death, by renewing our nature, and mortifying our luſts; by reſtoring us to the life of grace and holineſs, and *deſtroying the body of ſin in us, that henceforth we ſhould not ſerve ſin.* And that this is a great argument of the mighty love of God to us, the Apoſtle tells us, *Eph.* ii. 4, 5. *God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in ſins, hath quickned us together with Chriſt.* It is an argument of the riches of God's mercy, and of his great love to us to recover us out of this ſad and deplorable caſe. It is a kindneſs infinitely greater, than to redeem us from the moſt wretched ſlavery, or to reſcue us from the moſt dreadful and cruel temporal death; and yet we ſhould value this as a favour and benefit, that could never be ſufficiently acknowledged: But God hath ſent his Son to deliver us from a worſe bondage, and a more dreadful kind of death; ſo that well might the Apoſtle aſcribe this great deliverance of mankind from the ſlavery of our luſts, and the death of ſin, to the boundleſs mercy and love of God to us. *God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickned us together with Chriſt, even when we were dead in ſins*; when our caſe was as deſperate as could well be imagined; then was God pleaſed to undertake this great cure, and to provide ſuch a remedy, as cannot fail to be effectual for our recovery, if we will but make uſe of it.

2. We were likewiſe judicially dead in law, being condemned by the juſt ſentence of it. So ſoon as ever we ſinned, eternal death was by the ſentence of God's law become our due portion and reward; and this being our caſe, God in tender commiſeration and pity to mankind, was pleaſed to ſend his Son into the world, to interpoſe between the juſtice of God and the demerits of men; and by reverſing the ſentence that was gone out againſt us, and procuring a pardon for us, to reſcue us from the miſery of eternal death; and not only ſo, but upon the condition of faith and repentance, of obedience and a holy life, to beſtow eternal life upon us; and by this means to reſtore us to a better condition than that from which we were fallen, and to advance us to a happineſs greater than that of innocency.

And was not this great love, to deſign and provide ſo great a benefit and bleſſing for us, *to ſend his Son Jeſus to bleſs us, in turning away every one of us from our iniquities?* Our bleſſed Saviour, who came from *the boſom of his Father*, and knew his tender affection and compaſſion to mankind, ſpeaks of this as a moſt wonderful and unparallel'd expreſſion of his love to us, *John* iii. 16. *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son. God ſo loved the world*, ſo greatly, ſo beyond our biggeſt hopes, nay, ſo contrary to all reaſonable expectations, *as to ſend his only-begotten Son, to ſeek and to ſave* the ſinful ſons of men.

If it had only in general been declared to us, that God was about to ſend his Son into the world upon ſome great deſign, and been left to us to conjecture, what his errand and buſineſs ſhould be; how would this have alarmed the guilty conſciences of ſinful men, and filled them with infinite jealouſies and ſuſpicion, with fearful expectations of *wrath and fiery indignation to conſume them*; For conſidering the great wickedneſs and degeneracy of mankind, what could we have thought, but that ſurely God was ſending his Son upon a deſign of vengeance to chaſtiſe a ſinful world, to vindicate the honour of his deſpiſed laws, and to revenge the multiply'd affronts which had been offered to the higheſt majeſty of heaven, by his pitiful and ungrateful creatures; Our own guilt would have been very apt to have filled us with ſuch imaginations as theſe, that in all likelihood the Son of God was coming to judgment, to call the wicked world to an account, to proceed againſt his Father's rebels, to paſs ſentence upon them, and to execute the vengeance which they had deſerved. This we might juſtly have dreaded; and indeed conſidering our caſe, how ill we have deſerved at God's hands, and how highly we have provoked him; what other weighty matter could we hope for.

But the goodneſs of God hath ſtrangely outdone our hopes, and deceived our expectation; ſo it follows in the next words, *God ſent not his Son into the world to condemn the world* (intimating that this we might juſtly have imagined and feared) but upon a quite contrary deſign, *that through him the world might be ſaved.* What a ſurpriſe of kindneſs is here! that inſtead of *ſending his Son to condemn us,* he ſhould *ſend him into the world to ſave us*; to reſcue us from the jaws of death and of hell, from that eternal and intolerable miſery which we had incurred and deſerved!

And if he had proceeded no farther, this had been wonderful mercy and kindneſs: But his love ſtopt not here, it was not contented to ſpare us, and free us from miſery; but was reſtleſs till it had found out a way to bring us to happineſs; for *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,* not only *that whoſoever believes in him might not periſh,* but *might have everlaſting life.* This is the *ſecond* evidence of God's great love to us, the greatneſs of the bleſſing and benefit which he hath deſigned and provided for us, *that we might live through him*; not only be delivered from ſpiritual and eternal death, but be made partakers of eternal life.

III. The laſt evidence of God's great love to us, which I mentioned, was this, that God was pleaſed to uſe ſuch a means, for the obtaining and procuring of this great bleſſing and benefit; *he ſent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* And this will appear to be great love indeed, if we conſider theſe *four* things.

1. The perſon whom he was pleaſed to employ upon this deſign; *he ſent his only-begotten Son.*

2. How much he abaſed him, in order to the effecting and accompliſhing of this deſign, implied in theſe words, *he ſent him into the world.*

3. If we conſider to whom he was ſent, to *the world.* And,

4. That he did all this voluntarily and freely, out of his mere pity and goodneſs; not conſtrained hereto by any neceſſity, not prevailed upon by any application or importunity of ours, nor obliged by any benefit or kindneſs from us.

1. Let us conſider the perſon whom God was pleaſed to employ in this deſign, *he ſent his only-begotten Son*; no leſs perſon than *his own Son,* and no leſs dear to him, than *his only-begotten Son.*

(1.) No leſs perſon than *his own Son*; and the dignity of the perſon that was employed in our behalf, doth ſtrangely heighten and ſet off the kindneſs. What an endearment is it of the mercy of our redemption, that God was pleaſed to employ upon this deſign no meaner perſon than *his own Son, his begotten Son*; ſo he is called in the text, *his Son,* in ſo peculiar a manner *as no creature is, or can be*; the creatures below man are call'd the works of God, but never his children; the Angels are in ſcripture call'd the ſons of God; and *Adam* likewiſe is call'd the ſon of God, becauſe God made him after his own image and likeneſs in holineſs and righteouſneſs, and in his dominion and ſovereignty over the creatures below him; but this title of *begotten Son of God* was never given to any of the creatures, man or Angel; *for unto which of the Angels ſaid he at any time, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,* as the Apoſtle reaſons, *Heb.* i. 5. He muſt be a great perſon indeed to whom this title belongs, of *the begotten Son of God*; and it muſt be a mighty love indeed which moved God to employ ſo great a perſon, on the behalf of ſo pitiful and wretched creatures as we are. It had been a mighty condeſcenſion for God to treat with us at all; but that no leſs perſon than his *own Son* ſhould be the ambaſſador, is an aſtoniſhing regard of heaven to poor ſinful duſt and aſhes.

(2.) The perſon was as dear to God, as he was great; he was *his only-begotten Son.* It had been a great inſtance of *Abraham*'s love and obedience to God, to have ſacrificed *a ſon* at his command; but this circumſtance makes it much greater, that it was his *only ſon*; *hereby I know that thou feareſt God* (ſays the Angel) *ſince thou haſt not withheld thy ſon, thine only ſon from me.* This is a demonſtration that God loved us at a ſtupendous rate, when he would ſend *his only-begotten Son* into the world for us.

Before this, God had tried ſeveral ways with mankind, and employed ſeveral meſſengers to us; ſometimes he ſent his Angels, and many times his ſervants the prophets; *but in theſe laſt days he hath ſent his Son.* He had many more ſervants to have employed upon this meſſage, but he had but *one Son*; and rather than mankind ſhould be ruined and loſt, he would ſend him. Such was the love of God towards us, that rather than our recovery ſhould not be effected, he would employ in this work the greateſt and deareſt perſon to him both in heaven and earth, *his only-begotten Son*; *in this was the love of God manifeſted, that he ſent his only-begotten Son, that we might live through him.*

Let us conſider how much this glorious and excellent perſon was abaſed in order to the effecting and accompliſhing of this deſign, which is here expreſſed by *ſending him into the world*; and this comprehends his incarnation, with all the mean and abaſing circumſtances of it. This the Apoſtle declares fully to us, *Phil.* ii. 6, 7. though *he was in the form of God* (that is, truly and really God) *yet he made himſelf of no reputation,* ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε, *he emptied himſelf,* was contented to be ſtrangely leſſened and diminiſhed, *and took upon him the form of a ſervant,* or ſlave, *and was made in the likeneſs of men*; that is, did really aſſume human nature. Here was an abaſement indeed, for God to become man, *for the only-begotten Son of God to take upon him the form of a ſervant, and to become obedient to death, even the death of the croſs,* which was the death of Slaves, and infamous malefactors. Here was love indeed, that God was willing that his own dear Son ſhould be thus obſcured and diminiſhed, and become ſo mean and ſo miſerable for our ſakes; that he ſhould not only ſtoop *to be made man, and to dwell among us,* but that he ſhould likewiſe ſubmit to *the infirmities of our nature, and to be made in all things like unto us, ſin only excepted*; that he ſhould be contented to bear ſo many affronts and indignities from perverſe and unthankful men, and *to endure ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf*; that *he who was the brightneſs of his Father's glory,* ſhould be *deſpiſed and rejected of men, a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with griefs,* and rather than we ſhould periſh, ſhould put himſelf into our place, and be contented to ſuffer and die for us; and that God ſhould be willing that all this ſhould be done to *his only Son,* to ſave ſinners. What greater teſtimony could he give of his love to us?

3. Let us conſider farther to whom he was ſent, which is alſo implied in theſe words, *he ſent his Son into the world*; into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him; and an ungrateful world, that did moſt unworthily uſe him.

Firſt, Into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him, that had deſerved no ſuch kindneſs at his hands. For what were *we*, that God ſhould ſend ſuch a perſon amongſt us, that he ſhould make his Son ſtoop ſo low, as to dwell in our nature, and to become *one of us?* We were rebels and enemies, *enemies to God by evil works,* up in arms againſt heaven, and at open defiance with God our maker. When the world was in this poſture of enmity and hoſtility againſt God; then he ſent his Son to treat with us, and to offer us peace. What can more commend the love of God, than this that he ſhould ſhew ſuch kindneſs to us, when we were ſinners and enemies? herein *God hath commended his love towards us*; (ſays the Apoſtle, *Rom.* v. 8.) in that *whilſt we were yet ſinners, Chriſt died for us.*

Secondly, Into an ungrateful world, that did moſt unworthily uſe him, that gave no becoming entertainment to him (*the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had neſts; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head*) that heaped all manner of contumelies and indignities upon him, that perſecuted him all his life, and at laſt put him to a moſt painful and ſhameful death; in a word, that was ſo far from receiving him as *the Son of God*, that they did not treat him with common humanity, and like *one of the ſons of men.*

4. He did all this voluntarily and freely; *God ſent his Son into the world*, *mero motu*, of his own mere grace and goodneſs. moved by nothing but his own bowels, and the conſideration of our miſery; not overpowered by any force; (for what could offer violence to him *to whom all power belongs?*) not conſtrained by any neceſſity, for he had been happy, though we had remained for ever miſerable; he might have choſen other objects of his love and pity, and have left us involved in that miſery, which we had wilfully brought upon ourſelves.

Nor was he prevail'd upon by any application from us, or importunity of ours to do this for us. Had we been left to have contrived the way of our recovery; this which God hath done for us, could never have entered into the heart of man to have imagined, much leſs to have deſired it at his hands. If the way of our ſalvation had been put into the hands of our own counſel and choice, how could we have been ſo impudent as to have begged of God that *his only Son* might deſcend from heaven and *become man*, be poor, deſpiſed and miſerable for our ſakes? God may ſtoop as low as he pleaſeth, being ſecure of his own majeſty and greatneſs; but it had been a boldneſs in us, not far from blaſphemy, to have deſired of him to condeſcend to ſuch a ſubmiſſion.

Nor, *laſtly*, was he pre-obliged by any kindneſs or benefit from us; ſo far from that, that we had given him all poſſible provocation to the contrary, and had reaſon to expect the effect of his heavieſt diſpleaſure: And yet though *he* was the *pars læſa*, the party that had been diſobliged and injured; though *we* were firſt in the offence and provocation, *he* was pleaſed to make the firſt overtures of peace and reconciliation; and though it was wholly *our* concernment, and not *his*; yet he was pleaſed to condeſcend ſo far, to our perverſneſs and obſtinacy, as *to ſend his Son to us*, and *to beſeech us to be reconciled*.

Now *herein* (ſays the Apoſtle, immediately after the *text*) *herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be the propitiation for our ſins*: Herein is the love of God manifeſted, that the kindneſs began on *his* part, and not on *ours*; that being neither obliged nor deſired by us, he did freely and of his own accord *ſend his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*.

What now remains but to apply this to ourſelves?

1. Let us propound to ourſelves the love of God for our pattern and example. This is the inference which the Apoſtle makes in the next verſe but one after the *text*, *Beloved, if God ſo loved us, we ought alſo to love one another*. One would have thought the inference ſhould have been, *if God ſo loved us, that we ought alſo to love him*. But the Apoſtle doth not ſpeak ſo much of the affection as the effect of love; and his meaning is, if God hath beſtowed ſuch benefits upon us, we ought, in imitation of him, to be kind and beneficial one to another. Not but that we ought *to love God with all our hearts, and ſouls, and ſtrength*; but in this ſenſe we are not capable of it. We cannot be beneficial to him; becauſe he is ſelf-ſufficient, and ſtands in need of nothing; and therefore the Apoſtle adds this as a reaſon, why he does not exhort men to love God, but one another; *no man hath ſeen God at any time*; he is not ſenſible to us, and therefore none of theſe ſenſible things can ſignify any thing to him. But he hath friends and relations here in the world, who are capable of the ſenſible effects of our love, and to whom we may ſhew kindneſs for his ſake; we cannot be beneficial to God, but we may teſtify our love to him, by our kindneſs and charity to men who are made after the image of God; and if we ſee any one miſerable, that is conſideration enough to move our charity. There was nothing but this in us to move him to pity us, *when we were in our blood, and no eye pitied us*.

God is a pattern of the moſt generous kindneſs and charity. Though he be infinitely above us, yet he thought it not below him to conſider our caſe, and to employ his only Son to ſave us; he had no obligation to us, no expectation of advantage from us, and can never be in a poſſibility to ſtand in need of us; and yet he loved us, and hath conferred the greateſt benefits upon us: ſo that no man can have deſerved ſo ill at our hands, but that if he be in want, and we in a condition to help him, he ought to come within the compaſs and conſideration of our charity.

And *this* is the proper ſeaſon for it, when we commemorate the greateſt bleſſing and benefit that was ever conferred on mankind, *The Son of God ſent into the world, on purpoſe to redeem and ſave us*. And therefore I cannot but very much commend the cuſtom of feeding and relieving the poor, more eſpecially at *this time*, when the poor do uſually ſtand moſt in need of it, and when we commemorate *the grace of our*

Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who being rich became poor for our ſakes, that we through his poverty might be made rich.

2. Let us readily comply with the great deſign of this great love of God to mankind. *He hath ſent his Son that we may live through him.* But though he hath done all this for us, though he hath purchaſed ſo great bleſſings for us, as the pardon of our ſins, and power againſt them, and eternal life and happineſs; yet there is ſomething to be done on our parts, to make us partakers of theſe benefits. God hath not ſo loved us, as to ſend his Son into the world, to carry men to heaven whether they will or no; and to reſcue thoſe from the ſlavery of the devil, and the damnation of hell, who are fond of their fetters, and wilfully run themſelves upon ruin and deſtruction. But the Son of God came to offer happineſs to us, upon certain terms and conditions, ſuch as are fit for God to propound, and neceſſary for us to perform, to make us capable of the bleſſedneſs which he offers; as namely, *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; a ſincere and conſtant endeavour of obedience to the laws and precepts of our holy religion.

Theſe are the terms of the Goſpel; and *the grace of God which brings ſalvation,* offers it only upon theſe terms, *that we deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this preſent world:* then we may *expect the bleſſed hope.* But if we will not ſubmit to theſe conditions, the Son of God will be no Saviour to us; for *he is the author of eternal ſalvation* only *to them that obey him.* If men will continue in their ſins, the redemption wrought by Chriſt will be of no advantage to them; ſuch as obſtinately perſiſt in an impenitent courſe, *ipſa ſi velit Salus, ſervare non poteſt, Salvation itſelf cannot ſave them.*

Theſe are the conditions of our happineſs, and if we ſubmit to them we are *heirs of eternal life*; if we refuſe, we are *ſons of perdition,* eternally loſt and undone; for we may aſſure ourſelves, that theſe are the beſt and eaſieſt terms that can ever be offered to us, becauſe God ſent them by *his Son.* This is the laſt effort of the divine love and goodneſs, towards the recovery and ſalvation of men; ſo the Apoſtle tells us, *Heb.* i. 1, 2. that *God, who at ſundry times, and in divers manners ſpake to the fathers, by the prophets, hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken unto us by his Son*; and if we refuſe to hear him, he will ſpeak no more. After this it is not to be expected, that God ſhould make any farther attempts for our recovery; for he can ſend no greater nor dearer perſon to us, than *his own Son*; and if we refuſe him, whom will we reverence? If after this we ſtill wilfully go on in our ſins; *there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin; but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to conſume us.*

3. With what joy and thankfulneſs ſhould we commemorate this great love of God to mankind, in *ſending his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him!*

This is the proper end of the bleſſed ſacrament, which we are now going to receive, to repreſent to our minds the incarnation and paſſion of our dear Lord, by the ſymbols of his body broken, and his blood ſhed for us. With what acknowledgments ſhould we celebrate the memory of this wonderful love, which the Son of God hath ſhewn to the ſons of men; endeavouring to make all the world in love with him, who hath ſo loved all mankind!

Whenever we ſee his blood poured forth, and his body broken for us, ſo moving a ſight ſhould raiſe ſtrange paſſions in us, of love to our Saviour, and hatred to our ſins; and ſhould inſpire us with mighty reſolutions of ſervice and obedience to him; and whenever the pledges and ſeals of theſe benefits are delivered into our hands, the ſight of them ſhould at once wound and revive our hearts, and make us cry out, *Lord, how unworthy am I, for whom thou ſhouldeſt do and ſuffer all this! I am overcome by thy love, and can no longer hold out, againſt the mighty force of ſuch kindneſs! I render myſelf to thee, and will ſerve thee for ever, who haſt redeemed me at ſo dear a rate.*

Now to him that ſitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb that was ſlain, to God even our Father, and to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the firſt begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, unto him that hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and prieſts to God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXII.

The Sin and Danger of adding to the Doctrine of the Goſpel.

GALAT. i. 8, 9.

But though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, If any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.

BEFORE I come to handle the words, for the better underſtanding of them, I ſhall give a brief account of the occaſion of them, which was this. Some falſe Apoſtles had made a great diſturbance in the churches planted by the Apoſtles of Chriſt, by teaching that it was neceſſary for Chriſtians, not only to embrace and entertain the doctrines and precepts of the chriſtian religion, but likewiſe to be circumciſed and keep the law of *Moſes*. Of this diſturbance which was raiſed in the chriſtian church, you have the hiſtory at large, *Acts* xv. and as in ſeveral other churches, ſo particularly in that of *Galatia*, theſe falſe Apoſtles and ſeducers had perverted many, as appears by this epiſtle; in the beginning whereof St. *Paul* complains, that thoſe who were ſeduced into this error of the neceſſity of circumciſion, and keeping the law of *Moſes*, had by this new article of faith, which they had added to the chriſtian religion, quite altered the frame of it, and made the Goſpel another thing from that which our Saviour delivered, and commanded his Apoſtles to teach all nations.

For he tells us, ver. 6. of this chapter, that *he marvelled, that they were ſo ſoon removed from him that called them by (or through) the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel*, that is ſo different from that which they had been inſtructed in by thoſe who firſt preached the goſpel unto them: for the making of any thing neceſſary to ſalvation, which our Saviour in his Goſpel had not made ſo, he calls *another Goſpel. I marvel, that ye are ſo ſoon removed from him that called you by the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel, which is not another,* ὃ ȣ̓κ ἔϛιν ἄλλο, *which is no other thing*, or *by which I mean nothing elſe, but that there are ſome that trouble you, and would pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt*; as if he had ſaid, when I ſay that *ye are removed to another Goſpel*, I do not mean, that ye have renounced chriſtianity, and are gone over to another religion, but that ye are ſeduced by thoſe who have a mind to pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt, by adding ſomething to it, as a neceſſary and eſſential part of it, which Chriſt hath not made ſo: This the Apoſtle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the Goſpel; becauſe, by thus altering the terms and conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our Saviour delivered it.

And then at the 8th and 9th verſes he denounceth a terrible *anathema* againſt thoſe, whoever they ſhould be, yea, though it were an Apoſtle, or an Angel from heaven, who by thus *perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt* (that is, by making any thing neceſſary to be believed or practiſed, which our Saviour in his goſpel hath not made ſo) ſhould in effect *preach another Goſpel; but though we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be* anathema, *an accurſed thing*. And then to expreſs his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to ſhew that he did not ſpeak this raſhly, and in a heat, but upon due conſideration, he repeats it again in the next verſe, *As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.*

From the words thus explained by the conſideration of the context, and of the main ſcope and deſign of this epiſtle, theſe following *obſervations* do naturally ariſe.

Firſt, That the addition of any thing to the chriſtian religion, as neceſſary to be believed and practiſed in order to ſalvation, is *a perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another Goſpel.*

Secondly, That no pretence of infallibility is ſufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the chriſtian doctrine, as neceſſary to be believed and practiſed in order to ſalvation.

Thirdly, That chriſtians may judge and diſcern when ſuch additions are made.

Fourthly, And conſequently, that ſince the declaration of the Goſpel, and the confirmation of it, there is no authority in the chriſtian church to impoſe upon Chriſtians any thing as of neceſſity to ſalvation, which the Goſpel hath not made ſo.

Fifthly, That there is no viſible judge (how infallible ſoever he may pretend to be) to whoſe definitions and declarations in matters of faith and practice, neceſſary to ſalvation, we are bound to ſubmit, without examination whether theſe things be agreeable to the Goſpel of Chriſt, or not.

Sixthly, and *Laſtly,* Whoſoever teacheth any thing as of neceſſity to ſalvation, to be believed or practiſed, beſides what the Goſpel of Chriſt hath made neceſſary, doth fall under the *anathema* here in the text, becauſe in ſo doing, *he perverteth the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preacheth another Goſpel.* Now the Apoſtle expreſly declares, *that though we* (that is, he himſelf, or any of the Apoſtles) *or an Angel from heaven, preach any other Goſpel unto you, than what we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed: as we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.*

I. That the addition of any thing to the chriſtian religion, as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed, in order to ſalvation, is *a perverting of the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another Goſpel.*

This is evident from the inſtances here given in this epiſtle; for the Apoſtle chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with *perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another Goſpel,* upon no other account, but becauſe they added to the chriſtian religion, and made circumciſion, and the keeping of the law of *Moſes,* an eſſential part of the chriſtian religion, and impoſed upon chriſtians the practice of theſe things, and the belief of the neceſſity of them, as a condition of eternal ſalvation.

That this was the doctrine of thoſe falſe teachers, we find expreſly, *Acts* xv. 1. *And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and ſaid, except ye be circumciſed after the manner of Moſes, ye cannot be ſaved*; and *ver.* 24. in the letter written by the Apoſtles and elders at *Jeruſalem,* to the churches abroad, there is this account given of it; *foraſmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, ſubverting your ſouls, ſaying ye muſt be circumciſed, and keep the law, to whom we gave no ſuch commandment.* Where you ſee that this doctrine is declared to be of pernicious conſequence, tending *to ſubvert the ſouls of men,* and likewiſe to be an addition to the doctrine of the Goſpel which was delivered by the Apoſtles, who here with one conſent declare, that *they had given no ſuch commandment*; that is, had delivered no ſuch doctrine as this, nor put any ſuch yoke upon the necks of Chriſtians; but on the contrary had declared, that the death of Chriſt having put an end to the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation, there was now no obligation upon Chriſtians to obſerve the law of *Moſes.*

And from the reaſon of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the chriſtian religion, as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed in order to ſalvation, which the Goſpel hath not made ſo, is *preaching another Goſpel*; becauſe it makes an eſſential change in the terms and conditions of the Goſpel-covenant, which declares ſalvation unto men upon ſuch and ſuch terms, and no other. Now to add any other terms to theſe, as of equal neceſſity with them, is to alter the condition of the covenant of the Goſpel, and the terms of the chriſtian religion, and conſequently *to preach another Goſpel,* by declaring other terms of ſalvation, than Chriſt in his Goſpel hath declared, which is to *pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt.*

II. No pretence of infallibility is ſufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the chriſtian doctrine, as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed, in order to ſalvation. After the delivery of the Goſpel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the world by his Apoſtles, who were commiſſioned and inſpired by him to that purpoſe, and the confirmation of all, by the greateſt and moſt unqueſtionable miracles that ever were, no perſon whatever that brought any other doctrine, and declared ſalvation to men on any other terms than thoſe which are declared in the Goſpel, was to be credited, what pretence ſoever he ſhould make to a divine commiſſion or an infallible aſſiſtance. The Apoſtle makes a ſuppoſition as high as can be, *though we* (ſays he) *or an Angel* *from heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an anathema.* If the Apoſtles themſelves, who were divinely commiſſioned, and infallibly aſſiſted in the preaching of the Goſpel, ſhould afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other terms of ſalvation, than thoſe which are declared in the Goſpel which they had already publiſhed to the world, they ought not to be regarded.

And the reaſon is plain; becauſe what claim ſoever any perſon may make to infallibility, and what demonſtration ſoever he may give of it, we cannot poſſibly believe him, if he contradict himſelf, and deliver doctrines which do plainly claſh with one another: For if he ſpake true at firſt, I cannot believe him, declaring the contrary afterwards: And if he did not ſpeak true at firſt, I cannot believe him at all; becauſe he can give no greater proof of his divine commiſſion, and infallible aſſiſtance and inſpiration, than he did at firſt.

And the reaſon is the ſame, if *an Angel from heaven* ſhould come and preach a contrary doctrine to that of the Goſpel, *he* were not to be believed neither; becauſe he could bring no better credentials of his divine commiſſion and authority, than thoſe had who publiſhed the Goſpel, and, conſequently, he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they had publiſhed before. For though a man were never ſo much diſpoſed to receive a revelation from God, and to ſubmit his faith to it; yet it is not poſſible for any man to believe God againſt God himſelf; that is to believe two revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from God; and the reaſon of this is very obvious, becauſe every man doth firſt, and more firmly, believe this propoſition or principle, *that contradictions cannot be true*, than any revelation whatſoever; for if contradictions may be true, then no revelation from God can ſignify any thing, becauſe the contrary may be equally true, and ſo truth and falſhood be all one.

The Apoſtle indeed only makes a *ſuppoſition*, when he ſays, *though we or an Angel from heaven, preach any other doctrine unto you*; but by this *ſuppoſition* he plainly bars any man, or company of men, from adding to the chriſtian religion any article of faith, or point of practice, as of neceſſity to ſalvation, which the Goſpel hath not made ſo: I ſay, any man, or company of men, whatever authority or infallibility they may lay claim to, becauſe they cannot pretend to a clearer commiſſion, and greater evidence of infallible aſſiſtance, than *an Apoſtle*, or *an Angel from heaven*, and yet the text tells us, *that* would not be a ſufficient warrant to preach another Goſpel; it might indeed bring in queſtion that which they had preached before, but could not give credit and authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconſiſtent with it.

III. Chriſtians may judge and diſcern when *another Goſpel is preached*, when new articles of faith, or points of practice, not enjoined by the Goſpel, are impoſed upon Chriſtians. This the Apoſtle ſuppoſeth every particular church, and for ought I know, every particular Chriſtian, that is duly inſtructed in the chriſtian religion, to be a competent judge of, and to be ſufficiently able to diſcern *when another Goſpel is preached*, and new terms and conditions, not declared in the Goſpel, are added to the chriſtian religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the Apoſtle does in vain caution them againſt the ſeduction of thoſe *who perverted the doctrine of Chriſt, and endeavoured to remove them from him that had called them by the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel.*

It may perhaps be ſaid, that there was no need that they ſhould be able to diſcern and judge of the doctrines of thoſe falſe teachers, it was ſufficient for them to believe the Apoſtle concerning the doctrines of thoſe ſeducers, when he declared to them the falſhood and pernicious conſequence of them. But the Apoſtle ſpeaks to them upon another ſuppoſition, which does neceſſarily imply, that they were able to diſcern and judge what doctrines were agreeable to the Goſpel, and what not; for he puts the caſe, that if he himſelf, or any of the Apoſtles, or an Angel from heaven, ſhould preach to them another doctrine, contrary to that of the Goſpel, they ought to reject it with deteſtation; but this doth neceſſarily ſuppoſe them able to judge, when ſuch doctrines were preached, and conſequently that all things neceſſarily to be believed and practiſed by all Chriſtians, are clearly and plainly declared in the Goſpel; all the doctrines whereof are now contained in the holy ſcriptures, in which all things neceſſary to faith and a good life, are ſo plainly delivered, that any ſober and inquiſitive perſon may learn them from thence; and the meaneſt capacity, by the help and direction of their guides and teachers, may be inſtructed in them.

And this is not only the principle of proteſtants, but the expreſs and conſtant doctrine of the ancient fathers of the church, whatever the church of *Rome*, for the maintaining of her uſurped authority over the conſciences of men, pretends to the contrary. And if this were not ſo, that men are able to diſcern and judge which are the doctrines of the Goſpel, and what is contrary to them; the doctrine of the Goſpel was in vain preached, and the holy ſcriptures containing that doctrine were written to no purpoſe.

Some things in ſcripture are granted to be obſcure and difficult, on purpoſe to exerciſe the ſtudy and enquiries of thoſe who have leiſure and capacity for it; But all things neceſſary are ſufficiently plain; otherwiſe it would be impoſſible to judge when *another Goſpel is preached*, which the Apoſtle here ſuppoſeth the *Galatians* capable of doing. For if the revelation of the Goſpel be not ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary to be believed and practiſed, then Chriſtians have no rule whereby to judge what doctrines are agreeable to the Goſpel, and what not, for an obſcure rule is of no uſe; that is, in truth, is no rule to thoſe to whom it is obſcure.

I proceed to the IVth *obſervation*, which is plainly conſequent from thoſe laid down before; namely, that ſince the declaration of the Goſpel, and the confirmation given to it, there is no authority in the chriſtian church to impoſe upon Chriſtians any thing, as of neceſſity to ſalvation, which the Goſpel hath not made ſo.

The commiſſion given by our Lord and Saviour to his Apoſtles, was *to preach the Goſpel to all nations* (or as St. *Matthew* expreſſes it) *to go and teach all nations, to obſerve all things whatſoever he had commanded them*; and this is that which we call the *Goſpel, viz.* that doctrine which Chriſt commanded his Apoſtles to preach and publiſh to the world; and if the Apoſtles themſelves had exceeded their commiſſion, and added any other points of faith or practice to thoſe which our Saviour gave them in charge to teach and publiſh to the world, they had, in ſo doing, been guilty of that which St. *Paul* here in the text chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with, *viz.* of *preaching another Goſpel*. And if the Apoſtles had no authority to add any thing to the Goſpel, much leſs can any others pretend to it, ſince they have neither ſo immediate a commiſſion, nor ſuch a miraculous power to give teſtimony to them, that *they are teachers come from God*.

Now this doctrine of the Goſpel, which the Apoſtles preached to the world, is that which Chriſtians are ſo often, and ſo earneſtly by the Apoſtles in all their epiſtles *exhorted to continue in, and not to ſuffer themſelves to be ſhaken in mind, by every wind of new doctrine*; becauſe that which the Apoſtles had delivered to them, was the intire doctrine of the Goſpel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. *Peter* calls *the holy commandment which was delivered unto them*, 2 Pet. ii. 21. *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*, ſpeaking in all probability of thoſe who were ſeduced by the errors of the *Gnoſticks*, from the purity of the chriſtian doctrine delivered to them by the Apoſtles. This likewiſe St. *Paul* calls *the common faith*, Titus i. 4. and St. *Jude* ver. 3. *the common ſalvation*; that is, the doctrine which contains the common terms of our ſalvation, and *the faith which was once delivered to the ſaints*, that is, by the Apoſtles of our Lord, who publiſhed the Goſpel; *once delivered*, that is, once for all, ſo as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This faith he *exhorts* Chriſtians *earneſtly to contend for*, againſt thoſe ſeveral ſects of ſeducers, which were crept into the chriſtian church, and did endeavour by ſeveral arts *to pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt*, and to deprave *the faith delivered* by the Apoſtles.

So that the doctrine of the Goſpel publiſhed by the Apoſtles, is fixed and unalterable, and there can be no authority in the church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed in order to ſalvation.

5. It follows likewiſe from the foregoing obſervations, that there is no *viſible judge* (how much ſoever he may pretend to *infallibility*) to whoſe determination and deciſion in matters of faith and practice neceſſary to ſalvation, Chriſtians are bound to ſubmit, without examination whether thoſe things be agreeable to the doctrine of the Goſpel, or not.

When our Saviour appeared in the world, though he had authority enough to exact belief from men, yet becauſe there was a ſtanding revelation of God made to the *Jews*, he appeals to that revelation, as well as to his own miracles, for the truth of what he ſaid, and offered himſelf, and his doctrine, to be tried by the agreeableneſs of it to the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament, and the predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reaſonable, it being impoſſible for any man to receive two revelations, as from

God, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and conſiſtent with one another. In like manner the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour, though they were guided and aſſiſted by an infallible ſpirit, and had an immediate commiſſion from Chriſt to preach the doctrine of the Goſpel, did not require from men abſolute ſubmiſſion to their doctrines and dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whether it were agreeable to that divine revelation which was contained in the ancient ſcriptures.

This was St. *Paul*'s conſtant cuſtom and way of teaching among the *Jews*, who had received the revelation of the Old Teſtament; he did not dictate to them by virtue of his infallibility, but *reaſoned with them out of the Scriptures*, and required their belief no further than what he ſaid ſhould, upon examination, appear agreeable to the ſcriptures. So we find *Acts* xvii. 2, 3. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them* (ſpeaking of the *Jews*) *and three ſabbath days reaſoned with them out of the ſcriptures, opening and alledging, that Chriſt muſt needs have ſuffered, and riſen again from the dead, and that this Jeſus whom I preach unto you is the Chriſt.* And chap. xviii. 28. *he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, ſhewing by the ſcriptures, that Jeſus was the Chriſt.* And St. *Paul* was ſo far from reproving them for examining his doctrine by the ſcriptures, that he commended it, as an argument of a noble and generous mind in the *Bereans*, that they did not give full aſſent to his doctrine, till upon due ſearch and examination they were ſatisfied that what he had ſaid was agreeable to the ſcriptures. *chap.* xvii. 11, 12. Where ſpeaking of the *Bereans*, it is ſaid, *That theſe were more noble than thoſe in* Theſſalonica, *in that they received the word, with all readineſs of mind, and ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether thoſe things were ſo; therefore many of them believed*; that is, becauſe upon ſearch they found what he delivered to be agreeable to the ſcriptures; and it was not a ſlight, but diligent and deliberate ſearch, they took time to examine things thoroughly; for it is ſaid *they ſearched the ſcriptures daily*. And here in the text St. *Paul* puts the caſe, that if he, or any other of the Apoſtles, concerning whoſe divine commiſſion and aſſiſtance they were ſo fully ſatisfied, ſhould deliver any thing to them contrary to the Goſpel which they had formerly preached, they were to reject it with the greateſt abhorrence and deteſtation; and this neceſſarily ſuppoſeth a liberty to examine what was delivered, even by thoſe whom they believed to be infallibly aſſiſted, and a capacity to diſcern and judge whether what they ſaid was agreeable to the Goſpel at firſt delivered to them or not.

And after this, ſhall any perſon or church (what claim ſoever they may make to infallibility) aſſume to themſelves an authority to dictate in matters of faith, and that their dictates ought to be received with an abſolute ſubmiſſion, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to *the faith once delivered to the ſaints*; and though they add new articles to the chriſtian faith, and of which there is not the leaſt footſtep or intimation in any of the ancient creeds of the chriſtian church, and do plainly impoſe upon Chriſtians the practice and belief of ſeveral things as neceſſary to ſalvation, which the Goſpel never declared to be ſo, yet no body ſhall judge of this, but every man ought without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to reſign up his underſtanding and judgment to the directions of this *viſible infallible judge*?

But ſurely this is not the reaſonable *obedience of faith*, but the forced ſubmiſſion of ſlaves to the tyranny of their maſters. Chriſtians are expreſly forbid *to call any man father or maſter upon earth*, becauſe *we have one father and maſter in heaven.* Now to make an abſolute ſubmiſſion of our underſtandings to any upon earth, ſo as without examination to receive their dictates in matters of faith, is ſurely, if any thing can be ſo, *to call ſuch a perſon father or maſter*, becauſe a greater ſubmiſſion than this we cannot pay to *our father who is in heaven*, even to God himſelf. I come now to the

VIth and laſt *obſervation* from the text, that whoſoever teacheth any thing as of neceſſity to ſalvation, to be believed or practiſed, beſides what the Goſpel of Chriſt hath made neceſſary, does fall under the *anathema* here in the text; becauſe they that do ſo, do, according to the mind of St. *Paul*, *pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preach another Goſpel.* For the reaſon why he chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with *preaching another Goſpel*, and thoſe that were ſeduced by them, as *being removed from him that called them by the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel*, is plainly this; that they had changed the terms of the chriſtian religion, by adding new articles to it, which were not contained in the Goſpel; that is, by making it neceſſary to believe it to be ſo, becauſe *they* taught ſo. Now St. *Paul* expreſly declares this to be *preaching another Goſpel*, becauſe they plainly altered the terms of ſalvation declared in the Goſpel, and made that to be neceſſary to the ſalvation of men, which the Goſpel had not made ſo.

And whatever perſon or church does the ſame, does incur the ſame guilt, and falls under the *anathema* and cenſure here in the text; yea, *though he were an Apoſtle, or an Angel:* And I am ſure no biſhop or church in the world can pretend either to an equal authority or infallibility with an *Apoſtle, or an Angel from heaven.*

Let us then hear what St. *Paul* declares in this caſe, and conſider ſeriouſly, with what earneſtneſs and vehemency he declares it; *Though we* (ſays he) *or an Angel from heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, If any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.* St. *Paul* you ſee is very earneſt in this matter, and very peremptory, and therefore I cannot but think this declaration of his to be more conſiderable, and every way more worthy of our regard and dread, than all the *anathemas* of the *council of Trent*, which in direct affront and contempt of this *anathema* of St. *Paul*, hath preſumed to add ſo many articles to the chriſtian religion, upon the counterfeit warrant of tradition, for which there is no ground or warrant from the ſcripture, or from any ancient creed of the chriſtian church.

And for the truth of this, I appeal to the creed of pope *Pius* the IVth, compiled out of the definitions of *the council of Trent*; by which *council* the *pope* only is authoriſed to interpret the true ſenſe and meaning of the canons and decrees of that *council*; and conſequently his interpretations muſt be of equal force and authority with that of the *council* itſelf. So that whatſoever he hath put into his new creed for an article of faith, ought to be received with the ſame pious affection and veneration, as if the creed had been compiled by the *council* itſelf; becauſe the *pope*, it ſeems, and no body elſe, underſtands the true meaning of that *council*, at leaſt is thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may juſtly wonder at the preſumption of thoſe, who after this declaration of the council, have taken upon them to *expound the catholick faith*, and to *repreſent* that religion to us, as it is defined in that *council*; becauſe if there be any controverſy about the meaning of its definitions (as there have been a great many even betwixt thoſe who were preſent at the council when thoſe definitions were made) none but the *pope* himſelf can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this creed of pope *Pius*, there are added to the ancient creed of the chriſtian church, twelve or thirteen new articles; as concerning *purgatory*, *tranſubſtantiation*, *the worſhip of images*, *the invocation of ſaints*, *the communion in one kind*, and that *the church of* Rome *is the mother and miſtreſs of all churches*, and *that there is no ſalvation to be had out of it*, and ſeveral other points, all which have either no foundation in ſcripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever eſteemed as *articles of faith* in the ancient chriſtian church for the firſt five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon Chriſtians, as of equal neceſſity to ſalvation, with the *twelve articles of the Apoſtles Creed*, and this under a pretence of infallibility, which St. *Paul* tells us would not have juſtified *an Apoſtle*, or *an Angel from heaven*, in making ſuch additions to the chriſtian religion, and the impoſing any thing as neceſſary to ſalvation, which is not ſo declared by the Goſpel of Chriſt.

And all that they have to ſay for this, is, that *we* do not pretend to be infallible: but there is a neceſſity of an infallible judge to decide theſe controverſies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is juſt as if in a plain matter of right, a contentious and confident man ſhould deſire a reference, and contrive the matter ſo as to have it referred to himſelf, upon a ſleeveleſs pretence, without any proof or evidence, that he is the only perſon in the world that hath authority and infallible skill to decide all ſuch differences. Thus the *church of Rome* would deal with us in things which are as plain as the noonday; as whether God hath forbidden the worſhip of images in the ſecond commandment? whether our Saviour did inſtitute the ſacrament in both kinds? whether the people ought not to read the ſcriptures, and to have the publick ſervice of God in a known tongue? theſe, and the like, they would have us refer to an infallible judge, and when we aſk who he is, they tell us that their church, which hath impoſed theſe things upon Chriſtians, and made theſe additions to the Goſpel of Chriſt, is that infallible judge. But if ſhe were as infallible as ſhe pretends to be, even as *an Apoſtle, or an Angel from heaven*, St. *Paul* hath denounced an *anathema* againſt her, for *preaching another Goſpel*, and making thoſe things neceſſary to the ſalvation of men, which are not contained in the *Goſpel of Chriſt*.

The *inference* from all this diſcourſe in ſhort, is this; that *we ſhould contend earneſtly for the faith once delivered to the ſaints*, and not ſuffer ourſelves, by the confident pretences of ſeducers, *to be removed from him that hath called us through the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel*. The neceſſary doctrines of the chriſtian religion, and the common terms of ſalvation are ſo plain, that if any man be ignorant of them, it is his own fault; and if any go about to impoſe upon us any thing as of neceſſity to be believed and practiſed in order to ſalvation, which is not declared to be ſo in the holy ſcriptures, which contain the true doctrine of the Goſpel, what authority ſoever they pretend for it, yea, though they aſſume to themſelves to be infallible; the Apoſtle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the caſe as high as is poſſible here in the text, when he ſays, *Though we, or an Angel from heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed*.

I will conclude all with that counſel which the Spirit of God gives to the churches of *Aſia*, Rev. iii. 3. *Remember therefore how thou haſt received and heard, and hold faſt*; and chap. ii. 10. *Fear none of thoſe things which thou ſhalt ſuffer, be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

SERMON XXXIII.

Honeſty the beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous Miſtakes in Religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.

SINCE there are ſo many different opinions and apprehenſions in the world about matters of religion, and every ſect and party does with ſo much confidence pretend, that *they*, and *they* only, are in the truth; the great difficulty and queſtion is, by what means men may be ſecured from dangerous errors and miſtakes in religion. For this end ſome have thought it neceſſary that there ſhould be *an infallible church*, in the communion whereof every man may be ſecured from the dangers of a wrong belief. But it ſeems God hath not thought this neceſſary: If he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular point of faith whatſoever. He would have told us expreſly, and in the plaineſt terms, that he had appointed *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*, and would likewiſe have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourſe to him upon all occaſions; becauſe the ſincerity of our faith depending upon him, we could not be ſafe from miſtake in particular points, without ſo plain and clear a revelation of this *infallible judge*, that there could be no miſtake about him; nor could there be an end of any other controverſies in religion, unleſs this *infallible judge* (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of controverſy. But neither of theſe are ſo: It is not plain from ſcripture that there is *an infallible judge and guide in matters of faith*; much leſs is it plain who he is; and therefore we may certainly conclude, that God hath not thought it neceſſary that there ſhould be *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*, becauſe he hath revealed no ſuch thing to us: and *that biſhop*, and *that church* who only have arrogated *infallibility* to themſelves, have given the greateſt evidence in the world to the contrary; and have been detected and ſtand convinced of the greateſt errors: and it is in vain for any man, or company of men, to pretend to *infallibility*, ſo long as the evidence that *they are deceived* is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their *infallibility*.

If then God hath not provided *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*; there is ſome other way whereby men may be ſecured againſt dangerous and damnable errors in religion, and whereby they may diſcern truth from impoſture, and what doctrines are from God, and what not; and this our Saviour declares to us here in the text, namely, that an honeſt and ſincere mind, and a hearty deſire to do the will of God, is the beſt preſervative againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν· *If any man deſire to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.*

There are *two* dangerous miſtakes in religion: To reject any thing which really comes from God; and to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which doth not really come from him.

Firſt, To reject any thing which really comes from God. This miſtake the *Jews* frequently fell into, when they rejected the true prophets which God from time to time ſent to them, ſlighting their meſſage, and perſecuting their perſons: but they miſcarried moſt fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true *Meſſias*, that great prophet whom they had ſo long expected, and whom God ſent at laſt, to bring ſalvation to them; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but uſed him with all the deſpite and contempt imaginable, not as *a teacher come from God*, but as a deceiver, and impoſtor.

Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from God, conſiſts in this, that it cannot be done without the higheſt affront to the divine Majeſty. To reject a divine meſſage or revelation, is to oppoſe God, and *fight againſt him.* So our Saviour tells the *Jews*, that *in deſpiſing him, they deſpiſed him that ſent him.*

Secondly, There is alſo another dangerous miſtake on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a revelation from God, which is not really from him. And this likewiſe the *Jews* were frequently guilty of, in receiving the falſe prophets which ſpake in the name of the Lord, when he had not ſent them. And this is commonly the temper of thoſe who reject the truth, greedily to ſwallow error and deluſion. So our Saviour tells us of the *Jews*, John v. 43. *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another ſhall come in his own name, him ye will receive.* This prediction of our Saviour's concerning the *Jews* was fully accompliſhed; for after they had rejected him, who gave ſuch abundant evidence that he was the true *Meſſias*, and *a teacher ſent from God*, they received others, who really *came in their own names*, and ran after thoſe who pretended to be the *Meſſias*, and were in great numbers deſtroyed with them. And this is very juſt with God, that *thoſe who receive not the truth in the love of it, ſhould be given up to ſtrong deluſions, to believe lies.*

Now theſe being the *two* great dangerous miſtakes in religion which men are liable to, my work at this time ſhall be to ſhew, how a ſincere deſire and endeavour *to do the will of God*, is a ſecurity to men againſt both thoſe dangers; and it will appear to be ſo, upon theſe *two* acconnts.

I. Becauſe he who ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right judgment of ſpiritual and divine things.

II. Becauſe God's providence is more eſpecially concerned to ſecure ſuch perſons from dangerous errors and miſtakes in things which concern their eternal ſalvation. Theſe ſhall be the *two* heads of my following diſcourſe.

Firſt, Becauſe he who ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right judgment of ſpiritual and divine things, and that for theſe two reaſons:

1. Becauſe ſuch a perſon has a truer notion of God and divine things.

2. Becauſe he is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after truth.

1. Becauſe ſuch a perſon hath a truer notion of God and divine things. No man is ſo likely to have clear and true apprehenſions of God, as a good man, becauſe he hath tranſcribed the divine perfections in his own mind, and is himſelf in ſome meaſure and degree what God is. And for this reaſon it is, that the ſcripture ſo often lays the foundation of all divine knowledge in the practice of religion, *Job* xxviii. 28. *The fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom, and to depart from evil, is underſtanding*; and *Pſal.* cxi. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom*, that is, the principle and foundation of it; *a good underſtanding have all they that do his commandments:* whereas the vices and luſts of men darken their reaſon and diſtort their underſtandings, and fill the mind with groſs and ſeuſual apprehenſions of things, and thereby render men unfit to

diſcern thoſe truths which are of a ſpiritual nature and tendency, and altogether indiſpoſed to receive them. For though the vices of men be properly ſeated in their wills, and do not poſſeſs their underſtandings; yet they have a bad influence upon them, as fumes and vapours from the ſtomach are wont to affect the head.

Nothing indeed is more natural to the mind and underſtanding of men, than the knowledge of God; but we may abuſe our faculties, and render them unfit for the diſcerning even of their proper objects.

When men by wicked practices, have rendered themſelves unlike to God, they will not love to *retain the knowledge of him* in their minds, but will *become vain in their imaginations* concerning him. What clouds and miſts are to the bodily eye, that the luſts and corruptions of men are to the underſtanding; they hinder it from a clear perception of heavenly things; *the pure in heart*, they are beſt qualified for *the ſight of God.*

Now according as a man's notions of God are, ſuch will be his apprehenſions of religion. All religion is either *natural*, or *revealed: natural religion* conſiſts in the belief of a God, and in right conceptions and apprehenſions concerning him, and in a due reverence and obſervance of him, and in a ready and chearful obedience to thoſe laws which he hath imprinted upon our nature; and the ſum of our obedience conſiſts in our conformity to God, and an endeavour to be like him. For ſuppoſing God to have made no external revelation of his mind to us, we have no other way to know his will, but by conſidering his nature, and our own; and if ſo, then he that reſembles God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, becauſe he finds thoſe perfections in ſome meaſure in himſelf, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man ſo ſure a notion of things, as practice and experience. Every good man is in ſome degree *partaker of a divine nature*, and feels that in himſelf, which he conceives to be in God: So that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he ſees the image of God in himſelf, and is able to diſcourſe of him from an inward ſenſe and feeling of his excellency and perfections.

And as for *revealed religion*, the only deſign of that is, to revive and improve the *natural* notions which we have of God, and all our reaſonings about divine revelation are neceſſarily gathered by our natural notions of religion: And therefore he that ſincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be impoſed upon by the vain and confident pretences of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be propoſed to him, which pretends to come from God, he meaſures it by thoſe ſteddy and ſure notions which he hath of the divine nature and perfections, and by thoſe he will eaſily diſcern whether it be worthy of Ged, or not, and likely to proceed from him: He will conſider the nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the Apoſtle expreſſes it) *a doctrine according to godlineſs*, ſuch as is agreeable to the divine nature and perfections, and tends to make us like to God: If it be not, though *an Angel from heaven* ſhould bring it, he will not receive it: If it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretence, and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill-minded men may make againſt it; but after he is ſatisfied of the reaſonableneſs and purity of the doctrine, he will accept of ſuch evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for God to give to his own revelations; and if the perſon that brings it, hath an atteſtation of *miracles* (which is neceſſary in caſe it be a new doctrine) and if he carry on no earthly intereſt and deſign by it, but does by his life and actions make it evident that he aims at the glory of God, and the good of men; in this caſe a good man, whoſe mind is free from paſſion and prejudice, will eaſily aſſent, that this man's *doctrine is of God, and that he does not ſpeak of himſelf.* This was the evidence which our Saviour offered to the *Jews* in vindication of himſelf, and his doctrine, *John* vii. 18. *He that ſpeaketh of himſelf, ſeeketh his own glory: but he that ſeeketh his glory that ſent him, the ſame is true, and no unrighteouſneſs is in him*; as if he had ſaid, hereby may you diſtinguiſh one that really comes from God, from an impoſtor: If any man *ſeek his own glory*, you may conclude that *God hath not ſent him*, but whatever he pretends, that *he ſpeaks of himſelf*, but he who by his life, and the courſe of his actions demonſtrates that *he ſeeks the honour of God*, and not any intereſt and advantage of *his own, the ſame is true, and there is no unrighteouſneſs in him*; that is, no falſhood or deſign to deceive (for ſo the word ἀδικία does ſometimes ſignify;) you may conclude ſuch an one to be no deceiver, or impoſtor. And if any man ſincerely deſires and endeavours *to do the will of God*, he may, by ſuch marks and characters as theſe, judge of any *doctrine* that pretends to be *from God*, whether it be ſo or not.

This is the *firſt* reaſon; becauſe he that ſincerely deſires and endeavours *to do the will of God*, hath the trueſt notion of God, and of divine things.

2. Such a perſon is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from error. He that hath an honeſt mind, and ſincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be ſwayed and biaſſed by any intereſt or luſt: For his great intereſt is to pleaſe God, and he makes all his other intereſts and concernments to ſtoop and yield to that. But if a man be governed by any earthly intereſt or deſign, he will meaſure all things by that, and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that croſſes it, and to judge equally of any doctrine that is oppoſite to his intereſt. This our Saviour gives for a reaſon, why the great *Rabbies* and teachers among the *Jews* did not believe and embrace his doctrine, *John* v. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?* If men have any other deſign in religion than to pleaſe God, and to advance his honour and glory in the world, no wonder if they be apt to reject the moſt divine truths; becauſe theſe are calculated, not to approve us to men, but to God.

And as vain-glory, and a deſire of the applauſe of men; ſo likewiſe doth every other luſt make a man partial in his judgment of things, and clap a falſe bias upon his underſtanding, which carries it off from truth, and makes it to lean towards that ſide of the queſtion which is moſt favourable to the intereſt of his luſts. A vicious man is not willing to entertain thoſe truths which would croſs and check him in his courſe: He hath made the truth his enemy, and therefore he thinks himſelf concerned to oppoſe it, and riſe up againſt it: the light of it offends him, and therefore he ſhuts his eyes that he may not ſee it. Thoſe holy and pure doctrines, which are from God, reprove the luſts of men, and diſcover the deformity of them; and therefore no wonder if bad men be ſo hard to be reconciled to them. This account our Saviour likewiſe gives of the fierce enmity of the *Jews* to him, and his doctrine, *John* iii. 19, 20. *Light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds were evil; for every one that hath done evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.*

The vicious inclinations of men are *a dead weight* upon their underſtandings, and able to draw down the ſcales againſt the cleareſt truths: For though it be abſolutely in no man's power to believe, or to disbelieve what he will; yet mens lives have many times a great influence upon their underſtandings, to make aſſent eaſy, or difficult; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, ſo are we very backward and ſlow in yielding our aſſent to any thing that croſſeth our inclinations. Men that allow themſelves *in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, will not eaſily believe thoſe doctrines which charge men ſo ſtrictly with all manner of holineſs, and purity.

This is the way which the devil hath always uſed to *blind the eyes of men, that the light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt might not ſhine into them.* And certainly the moſt effectual way to keep men in infidelity, is to debauch them in their lives; therefore the Apoſtle gives this as the reaſon of the infidelity of men in the laſt times, 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 12. *They believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.* When men once abandon themſelves to lewd and vicious practices, infidelity becomes their intereſt, becauſe they have no other way to defend and excuſe a wicked life, but by denying the truth which oppoſeth it, and finds fault with it.

That man only ſtands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the dominion of no vice, or luſt; becauſe he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to ſeduce him, or draw him aſide in his enquiry after truth; he hath no intereſt but to find the truth, and follow it; he is enquiring after the way to heaven, and eternal happineſs, and he hath the indifferency of a traveller which is not inclined to go this way rather than another; for his concernment is to find out the right way, and to walk in it: Such an indifferency of mind hath every good man, who ſincerely deſires *to do the will of God*; he ſtands ready to receive truth, when ſufficient evidence is offered to convince him of it; becauſe he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary propoſition ſhould be true. As in *mathematicks*, a man is ready to give his aſſent to any propoſition, that is ſufficiently demonſtrated to him, becauſe he hath no inclination or affection to one ſide of the queſtion more than to the other; all his deſign and concernment is to find out the truth on which ſide ſoever it lies; and he is like to find it, becauſe he is ſo indifferent, and impartial. But if a man be biaſs'd by any luſt, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an intereſted perſon, and concerned to be partial in his judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of God are propoſed to him; becauſe whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that doctrine, which is ſo contrary to his inclination and intereſt. If the affections and intereſts of men were as deeply concerned, and as ſenſibly touched in the truth of *mathematical* propoſitions, as they are in the principles of *morality* and *religion*, we ſhould find, that when a propoſition ſtood in their way, and lay croſs to their intereſt, though it were never ſo clearly demonſtrated, yet they would raiſe a duſt about it, and make a thouſand cavils, and fence even againſt the evidence of a *demonſtration*; they would palliate their error with all the ſkill and art they could; and though the abſurdity of it was never ſo great and palpable, yet they would hold it faſt againſt all ſenſe and reaſon, and face down mankind in the obſtinate defence of it; for we have no reaſon to doubt, but that they who in matters of *religion* will believe directly contrary to what they ſee, would, if they had the ſame intereſts and paſſions to ſway them in the caſe, believe contrary to the cleareſt *mathematical demonſtration*; for where there is an obſtinate reſolution not to be convinced, all the reaſon and evidence in the world ſignifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biaſſed by no paſſion or intereſt, but hath an honeſt mind, and is ſincerely deſirous to *do the will of God*, ſo far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning any doctrines that are propoſed to him: For if there be not good evidence that they are *from God*, he hath no reaſon to deceive himſelf, in giving credit to them; and if there be good evidence that they are *divine*, he hath no intereſt or inclination to reject them; for it being his great deſign to *do the will of God*, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it, that he may do it.

Thus you ſee, how a ſincere deſire and endeavour to obey the will of God does ſecure men againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; becauſe ſuch perſons are hereby better diſpoſed to make a right judgment of divine things, both becauſe they have truer and ſurer notions of God and religion, and are more impartial in their ſearch and enquiry after truth. This is the *firſt* account.

II. Another reaſon why they who ſincerely deſire *to do the will of God*, have a great ſecurity in diſcerning truth from error, is, becauſe the providence of God is more eſpecially concerned to preſerve ſuch perſons from dangerous errors and miſtakes, in things which concern their eternal ſalvation. When men are of a teachable temper, God loves to reveal himſelf and his truth to them; and ſuch is an humble and obedient frame of mind, *Pſal.* xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment*; *the meek will he teach his way.* The proper diſpoſition of a ſcholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn is, *what is the good and acceptable will of God*, that we may *do it*, for practice is the end of knowledge. *If you know theſe things* (ſays our bleſſed Lord) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is neceſſary *to know the will of God*; but we are *happy* only in *the doing of it*: and *if any man be deſirous to do the will of God*, his goodneſs is ſuch, that he will take effectual care to ſecure ſuch an one againſt dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honeſt mind, and *would do the will of God*, if he knew it, God will not ſuffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be miſtaken about it, in any neceſſary points of faith and practice.

St. *Paul* is a wonderful inſtance of the goodneſs of God in this kind. He was undoubtedly a man of a very honeſt mind; he had entertained the *Jewiſh* religion, as revealed by God, and been bred in it; and out of a blind reverence and belief of his teachers, who rejected Chriſt and his doctrine, he likewiſe oppoſed and perſecuted them with a mighty zeal, and an honeſt intention, being *verily perſuaded* (as he himſelf tells us) *that he ought to do* what he did, *againſt the name of Jeſus of Nazareth*; he was under a great prejudice upon account of his education, and according to the heat of his natural temper, tranſported with great paſſion: But *becauſe he did* what he did, *ignorantly and in unbelief*; God was pleaſed *to ſhew mercy to him*, and, in a miraculous manner, to convince him of the truth of that religion which he perſecuted. He was ſincerely *deſirous to do the will of God*, and therefore God would rather work a miracle for his converſion, than ſuffer him to go on in ſo fatal a miſtake concerning the chriſtian religion.

And as the providence of God doth concern itſelf to ſecure good men from dangerous errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; ſo by a juſt judgment he gives up thoſe who allow themſelves in vicious practices, to error and infidelity. And this is the meaning of that paſſage of the prophet, *Iſa.* vi. 10. ſo often cited by our Saviour, and applied to the *Jews*, of *making the heart of that people fat, and their ears heavy, and cloſing* *their eyes, leſt they ſhould underſtand and be converted.* So again, *Iſa.* lxvi. 3, 4, God threatens the people of *Iſrael,* That becauſe they were wicked and abominable in their lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a ſpirit of deluſion; *they have choſen their own ways, and their ſoul delighteth in their abominations; I alſo will chooſe their deluſions.* God is ſaid to chooſe thoſe things for us, which he permits us to fall into: So *Rom.* i. 28. God is ſaid to *give over* the abominable heathen *to a reprobate mind. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over* εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, *to an injudicious and undiſcerning mind.* When men abandon themſelves to wickedneſs and impiety, God withdraws his grace from them; and by his ſecret and juſt judgment they are deprived of the faculty of diſcerning between truth and error, between good and evil. 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 10, 11, 12. it is ſaid, that *the man of ſin ſhould come with all deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs in them that periſh, becauſe they received not the love of the truth, that they might be ſaved:* And that *for this cauſe, God would ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lye; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.* And it is juſt with God, that men of vitious inclinations and practices ſhould be expoſed to the cheat of the groſſeſt and vileſt impoſtors. God's providence is concerned for men of honeſt minds, and ſincere intentions: But if men *take pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs,* God takes no further care of them, but *delivers them up to their own hearts luſts,* to be ſeduced into all thoſe errors, into which their own *vain imaginations,* and their *fooliſh hearts* are apt to lead them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to ſhew that an honeſt mind, that *ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God,* is the beſt ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; both becauſe it diſpoſeth a man to make a true judgment of divine things, and becauſe the providence of God is more eſpecially concerned for the ſecurity of ſuch perſons.

There remains an objection to be anſwered, to which this diſcourſe may ſeem liable; but *this* together with the *inferences* which may be made from this diſcourſe, I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON XXXIV.

The Second Sermon on this text.

Honeſty the beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous Miſtakes in Religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.

I Made entrance into theſe words the laſt day; in which our Saviour declares to us, that an honeſt and ſincere mind, and an hearty deſire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the beſt ſecurity and preſervative againſt dangerous errors and miſtakes in matters of religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν, *if any man deſire to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.*

Now there are (I told you) *two* great miſtakes in religion: *To reject any thing which really is from God*; and *to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which is not really from him.* And therefore I propoſed from this *text* to ſhew how a ſincere deſire and endeavour to do the will of God, is a ſecurity to men againſt both theſe dangers, namely, upon theſe *two* accounts.

Firſt, Becauſe he who ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right judgment of ſpiritual and divine things; and that for theſe two reaſons.

I. Becauſe ſuch a perſon hath a truer notion of God, and divine things. He that reſembleth God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, becauſe he finds thoſe perfections, in ſome meaſure, in himſelf, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man ſo ſure a notion of things, as practice and experience.

II. Becauſe ſuch a perſon is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from error. That man only ſtands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the power and dominion of no vice or luſt, becauſe he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to ſeduce him and draw him aſide in his enquiry after truth: He hath no manner of concernment that the contrary propoſition ſhould be true, having the indifferency of a traveller, and no other intereſt, but to find out the right way to heaven, and to walk in it. But if a man be biaſſed by any luſt, and addicted to any vitious practice, he is then an intereſted perſon, and concerned to make a partial judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of God are propoſed to him; becauſe, whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of thoſe doctrines, which are ſo contrary to his inclination and intereſt.

Secondly, Another reaſon why they who ſincerely deſire to do the will of God, have a greater ſecurity in diſcerning truth from error, is, becauſe the providence of God, is more eſpecially concerned to preſerve ſuch perſons from dangerous errors and miſtakes, in things which concern their eternal ſalvation. When men are of a teachable temper, of an humble and obedient frame of mind, God loves to reveal himſelf, and his truth to them, *Pſal.* xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.* The proper diſpoſition of a ſcholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn, is, *what is the good and acceptable will of God, that we may do it*; for practice is the end of knowledge; *If ye know theſe things* (ſaith our Saviour) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is neceſſary *to know the will of God*; but we are only *happy in the doing of it*; and *if any man be deſirous to do the will of God*, his goodneſs is ſuch that he will take effectual care to ſecure ſuch a one againſt dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honeſt mind, and would do the will of God, if he knew it, God will not ſuffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be miſtaken about it, in any neceſſary point of faith or practice. Thus far I have gone.

I ſhall now proceed to remove an *objection*, to which this diſcourſe may ſeem liable, and then draw ſome *inferences* from the whole.

After all that hath been ſaid, ſome perhaps may aſk, Is every good man then ſecure from all error and miſtake in matters of religion; This is a mighty privilege indeed: But do not we find the contrary in experience? that an honeſt heart, and a weak head, do often meet together?

For anſwer to this, I ſhall lay down theſe following *propoſitions*.

Firſt, That if there were any neceſſity, that a good man ſhould be ſecured from all manner of error and miſtake in religion, this probity of mind, and ſincere deſire to do the will of God, is the beſt way to do it; becauſe ſuch a temper and diſpoſition of mind gives a man the beſt advantages to diſcern betwixt truth and error; and God is moſt likely to reveal his will to ſuch perſons. But there is no neceſſity of this, becauſe a man may be a good man, and go to heaven, notwithſtanding a great many miſtakes in religion about things not neceſſary. For while we are in this imperfect ſtate, *we know but in part*, and ſee many things very imperfectly: But when we ſhall come into a more perfect ſtate, *that which is imperfect ſhall be done away*; the light of glory ſhall ſcatter all thoſe miſts and clouds, which are now upon our underſtandings, and hinder us from a clear ſight and judgment of things; we ſhall then ſee God, and other things, as they are; and be freed from all that ignorance, and thoſe many childiſh miſtakes, which we are liable to here below; and till then, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould be ſecured from them. Humility, under a ſenſe of our ignorance, is better for us, than infallibility would be.

Secondly, This temper and diſpoſition of mind which I have been ſpeaking of, is a certain ſecurity againſt fatal miſtakes in religion, and a final continuance in ſuch errors as would prove damnable; and this is all that this diſcourſe pretends to, or our Saviour hath promiſed in this *text*. And conſidering the goodneſs of God, nothing is more improbable, than that an honeſt mind that ſeeks impartially after truth, ſhould miſs of it, in things that are fundamentally neceſſary to ſalvation. And if we could ſuppoſe ſuch a man to fall into ſuch an error, either it would not be fundamental to *him*, having not been, perhaps, propoſed to him with ſufficient evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general repentance for all ſins and errors known or unknown; or he would not be permitted to continue in it; but the providence of God would find out ſome way or other to convince him of his error, and to bring him *to the acknowledgment of the truth, that he might be ſaved.* God would rather ſpeak to him immediately from heaven (as he did to St. *Paul*) than ſuffer him to continue in ſuch an error as would infallibly carry him to hell.

Thirdly, There is no ſuch depth of judgment, and ſubtilty of wit required, to diſcern between groſs and damnable errors in religion, and neceſſary and ſaving truth, but that an ordinary capacity may be able to do it. There is ſo plain a line drawn between great truth, and groſs errors, that it is viſible to every capacity; and an ordinary underſtanding, that is not under a violent prejudice, or blinded by ſome vice or fault of the will, may eaſily diſcern it. Indeed, in matters of leſſer moment or concernment, and which have no ſuch conſiderable and immediate influence upon the practice of an holy life, the difference betwixt truth and error is not always ſo groſs and ſenſible, as to be obvious to every unprejudiced eye. But we have all the reaſon in the world to believe, that the goodneſs and juſtice of God is ſuch, as to make nothing neceſſary to be believ'd by any man, which, by the help of due inſtruction, may not be made ſufficiently plain to a common underſtanding. God hath ſo tender a care of good men, who ſincerely love him and his truth, that we may reaſonably preſume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable miſtake concerning thoſe matters upon which their eternal ſalvation does depend. *The judge of all the world will do right*; and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not condemn any man for no fault, and make him for ever miſerable, for falling into an error, which with all his care and diligence, he could not poſſibly either diſcern or avoid.

Fourthly, God hath made abundant proviſion for our ſecurity from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, by theſe *three* ways.

I. By an *infallible rule*, ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary.

II. By ſufficient means of inſtruction, to help us to underſtand this rule.

III. By an *infallible promiſe* of ſecurity from dangerous errors and miſtakes, if with an honeſt mind and due diligence we apply ourſelves to underſtand this rule, and make uſe of the means of inſtruction, which God hath provided for that purpoſe.

I. God hath given us an *infallible rule*, ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary. He hath given us the holy ſcriptures, which were given at firſt by divine inſpiration, *i. e.* by men infallibly aſſiſted in the writing of them, and therefore muſt needs be an *infallible rule*; and *all ſcripture divinely inſpired; is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs*, as St. *Paul* tells us, 2 *Tim.* iii. 16. ſpeaking there of the books of the *Old Teſtament*; and there is the ſame reaſon as to the inſpired writings of the *New*.

Now if the ſcriptures be an *infallible rule*, and *profitable for doctrine and inſtruction in righteouſneſs*, *i. e.* to teach us to believe, and do; it follows of neceſſity, that they are ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary to faith and a good life; otherwiſe they could not be *uſeful for doctrine and inſtruction in righteouſneſs*; for a rule that is not plain to us in theſe things, in which it is neceſſary for us to be directed by it, is of no uſe to us; that is in truth, it is no rule. For a rule muſt have theſe two properties; it muſt be *perfect*, and it muſt be *plain*. The ſcriptures are a perfect rule, becauſe the writers of them being divinely inſpired, were infallible: And they muſt likewiſe be plain; otherwiſe, though they be never ſo perfect, they can be of no more uſe to direct our faith and practice, than a ſun-dial in a dark room is, to tell us the hour of the day: For though it be never ſo exactly made, unleſs the ſun ſhine clearly upon it, we had as good be without it. A rule that is not plain to us, whatever it may be in *itſelf*, is of no uſe at all to *us*, till it be made plain and we underſtand it.

II. God hath likewiſe provided ſufficient means of inſtruction to help us to underſtand this rule. It is not neceſſary that a rule ſhould be ſo plain, that we ſhould perfectly underſtand it at firſt ſight; it is ſufficient, if it be ſo plain that thoſe of better capacity and underſtanding may, with due diligence and application of mind, come to the true knowledge of it; and thoſe of a lower and more ordinary capacity, by the help and inſtruction of a teacher. *Euclid*'s *Elements* is a book ſufficiently plain to teach a man *Geometry*: but yet not ſo plain that any man at firſt reading ſhould underſtand it perfectly; but that by diligent reading, by a due application, and ſteddy attention of mind, a man of extraordinary

ordinary ſagacity and underſtanding may come to underſtand the *principles* and *demonſtrations* of it, and thoſe of a more ordinary capacity, with the help of a teacher, may come to the knowledge of it. So when we ſay that the ſcriptures are plain in all things neceſſary to faith, and a good life, we do not mean that every man at firſt hearing or reading of theſe things in it, ſhall perfectly underſtand them; but by diligent reading and conſideration, if he be of good apprehenſion and capacity, he may come to a ſufficient knowledge of them; and if he be of a meaner capacity, and be willing to learn, he may, by the help of a teacher, be brought to underſtand them without any great pains; and ſuch teachers God hath appointed in his church for this very purpoſe, and a ſucceſſion of them to continue to the end of the world.

In a word, when we ſay the ſcriptures are plain to all capacities, in all things neceſſary, we mean, that any man of ordinary capacity, by his own diligence and care, in conjunction with the helps and advantages which God hath appointed, and in the due uſe of them, may attain to the knowledge of every thing neceſſary to his ſalvation; and that there is no book in the world more plain, and better fitted to teach a man any *art* or *ſcience*, than the *Bible* is to direct and inſtruct men in *the way to heaven*; and it is every man's fault if he be ignorant of any thing neceſſary for him to believe, or do, in order to his eternal happineſs.

III. Good men are likewiſe ſecured from fatal errors in religion, by the *infallible* promiſe of God, if ſo be that with honeſt minds and due diligence they apply themſelves to the underſtanding of this rule, and make uſe of the means of inſtruction which God hath provided for that purpoſe. God hath promiſed *to guide and teach the humble and meek*; that is, ſuch as are of a ſubmiſſive and teachable temper, deſirous and diligent to be inſtructed in the truth. *Prov.* ii. 2, 3, 4, 5. *If thou incline thine ear to wiſdom, and apply thine heart to underſtanding; yea, if thou crieſt after knowledge, and lifteſt up thy voice for underſtanding; if thou ſeekeſt her as ſilver, and ſearcheſt for her as for hid treaſures; then ſhalt thou underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.* And here in the *text* our Saviour aſſures us, that *if any man be deſirous to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether he ſpake of himſelf*; *i. e.* he ſhall be able to diſcern the doctrines which are from God.

This is the proviſion which God hath made for our ſecurity from fatal miſtakes in religion; and this is in all reſpects a better ſecurity, and more likely to guide and conduct us ſafely to heaven, than any *infallible church*; and that for theſe reaſons.

Firſt, Becauſe it is much more certain that God hath made this proviſion which I have mentioned, than that there is *an infallible church* appointed and aſſiſted by him to this purpoſe. That the ſcriptures are *an infallible and adequate rule*, and ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary, I have already proved; and I add further, that this was the conſtant judgment of the ancient church, and ſo declared by the unanimous conſent of the fathers of it for many ages; and that all *councils* in their determination of faith, proceeded upon this rule, till the ſecond *council* of *Nice*.

I have likewiſe proved, that God hath provided a ſucceſſion of paſtors and teachers in his church, to inſtruct us in this rule; and that we have God's infallible promiſe for our ſecurity from dangerous errors and miſtakes, if with an honeſt mind and due diligence we apply ourſelves to underſtand this rule, and make uſe of the means of inſtruction which God hath provided for that purpoſe.

But that there is *an infallible church* appointed and aſſiſted by God, to declare and determine matters of faith, and to be an infallible interpreter of ſcripture, is not certain, becauſe there is no clear and expreſs text of ſcripture to that purpoſe, that any church whatſoever, much leſs that the *church of Rome* hath this power and privilege.

Nay, I add further, that it is impoſſible, according to the principles of the *church of Rome*, that this ſhould be proved from ſcripture; becauſe, according to their principles, we cannot know either which are the true books of ſcripture, or what is the true ſenſe of ſcripture, but from the authority and infallible declaration of that church. And if ſo, then the infallibility of the church muſt be firſt known, and proved, before we can either know the ſcriptures or the ſenſe of them; and yet till we know the ſcriptures, and the ſenſe of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now to pretend to prove the infallibility of their church by ſcripture, and at the ſame time to declare, that which are the true books of ſcripture, and what is the true ſenſe of them, can only be proved by the infallible authority of their church, is a plain and ſhameful *circle*, out of which there is no way of eſcape; and conſequently that God hath appointed *an infallible church* is impoſſible according to their principles, ever to be proved from ſcripture, and the thing is capable of no other proof. For that God will infallibly aſſiſt any ſociety of men, is not to be known, but by divine revelation. So that unleſs they can prove it by ſome other revelation than that of ſcripture (which they do not pretend to) the thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they ſay, by the *notes* and *marks* of the *true church*; but what thoſe *marks* are, muſt either be known from ſcripture, or ſome other divine revelation, and then the ſame difficulty returns; beſides that one of the moſt eſſential *marks of the true church* muſt be *the profeſſion of the true faith*; and then it muſt firſt be known which is *the true faith*, before we can know which is *the true church*; and yet they ſay, that no man can learn *the true faith*, but from *the true church*; and this runs them unavoidably into another *circle* as ſhameful as the other. So that which way ſoever they go to prove *an infallible church*, they are ſhut up in a plain *circle*, and muſt either prove the *ſcriptures* by *the church*, and *the church* by *the ſcriptures*; or *the true church* by *the true faith*, and *the true faith* by *the true church*.

Secondly, This proviſion and ſecurity which I have mentioned, is more human, better accommodated and ſuited to the nature of man; becauſe it doth not ſuppoſe and need a ſtanding and perpetual miracle, as the other way of *an infallible church* doth. All inſpiration is ſupernatural and miraculous, and this infallible aſſiſtance which the *church of Rome* claims to herſelf, muſt either be ſuch as the Apoſtles had, which was by immediate inſpiration, or ſomething equal to it, and alike ſupernatural: But God does not work miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occaſion for them. When God delivered the *law* to the people of *Iſrael*, it was accompanied with miracles, and the prophets which he ſent to them from time to time, had an immediate inſpiration; but their *ſupreme judicature*, or their *general council*, which they call the *Sanhedrim*, was not infallibly aſſiſted in the expounding of the *law*, when doubts and difficulties aroſe about it; no, nor in judging of true and falſe prophets; but they determined this, and all other emergent caſes, by the ſtanding revelation and rule of their *written law*; and that they were not infallibly aſſiſted, is evident from the great errors they fell into, in *making void the commandments of God by their traditions*, and in their rejecting and crucifying the true *Meſſias*, and the *Son of God*.

In like manner the Apoſtles and firſt teachers of the chriſtian religion, were immediately inſpired, and miraculouſly aſſiſted in the publiſhing of the chriſtian doctrine, and for the ſpeedy and more effectual propagating and planting of it in the world, in deſpite of the violent prejudices that were againſt it, and the fierce oppoſition that was made to it. But when this was done, this miraculous and extraordinary aſſiſtance ceaſed, and God left the chriſtian religion to be preſerved and continued by more human and ordinary ways, the doctrines of it being committed to *writing* for a *ſtanding rule* of faith and practice in all ages, and an *order* of men appointed to inſtruct people in thoſe doctrines, with a promiſe to ſecure both teachers and people, that ſincerely deſire to know, and do the will of God, from all fatal errors and miſtakes about things neceſſary to their eternal ſalvation; and this is a proviſion more likely to be made by God, and better ſuited to the nature of man, than the perpetual and needleſs miracle of an inſpired, or any otherwiſe *infallible church*.

Thirdly, This way is likewiſe more agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. The deſign of an *infallible church* is to ſecure all that continue in the communion of it, againſt all poſſibility of error in matters of faith. The queſtion now is not, whether *an infallible church* would do this? but whether that church which arrogates *infallibility* to itſelf, does not pretend to do this? And if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. For faith which is the principle of all religious actions, would be no virtue, if it were neceſſary. A true and right belief can be no virtue, where a man is *infallibly* ſecured againſt error. There is the ſame reaſon of virtuous and criminal actions; and as there can be no crime or fault in doing what a man cannot help; ſo neither can their be any virtue. All virtuous actions are matter of praiſe and commendation; and therefore it can be no virtue in any man, becauſe it deſerves no commendation; to believe and own that the ſun ſhines at noon-day, when he ſees it does ſo. No more would it be a virtue in any man, and deſerve praiſe, to believe aright, who is in a church wherein he is *infallibly* ſecured againſt all errors in matters of faith. Make any thing neceſſary, and impoſſible to be otherwiſe, and the doing of it ceaſes to be a virtue. God hath ſo framed religion, that the evidence of truth, and the means of coming to the knowledge of it, as to be a ſufficient ſecurity to men of honeſt minds and teacheable tempers, againſt all fatal and final miſtakes concerning things neceſſary to ſalvation; but not ſo, that every man that is of *ſuch a church* ſhould be *infallibly* ſecured againſt all errors in matters of faith; and this on purpoſe to try the virtue and diſpoſition of men, whether they will be at the pains to ſearch for truth, and when it is propoſed to them with ſufficient evidence, though not by an *infallible* hand, they will *receive it in the love of it, that they may be ſaved.*

Fourthly, This is as much ſecurity againſt errors in matters of faith, as God hath provided againſt ſin and vice in matters of practice; and ſince a right belief is only in order to a good life, a man would be hard put to it, to give a wiſe reaſon, why God ſhould take greater care for the *infallible* ſecurity of mens faith, than of their obedience. The reaſon pretended why God ſhould make ſuch *infallible* proviſion for a right faith, is, for the better ſecurity of mens eternal ſalvation, and happineſs. Now the virtues of a good life have a more direct and immediate influence upon *that,* than the moſt orthodox belief. *The end of the commandment* (*i. e.* of the declaration of the Goſpel) *is charity.* In the chriſtian religion that which mainly avails to our juſtification and ſalvation is, *a faith that worketh by charity,* and *the keeping of the commandments of God He that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them* (ſaith our bleſſed Lord) *I will liken him to a wiſe man that built his houſe upon a rock*; and again, *not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord,* (*i. e.* makes profeſſion of faith in me) *ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven*; and again, *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* And the Apoſtle St. *Peter* exhorts chriſtians to *add to their faith knowledge, and virtue, and godlineſs, and brotherly kindneſs, and charity, that ſo an abundant entrance may be miniſtred to them, into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* So that the virtues of a good life have the greateſt influence upon our ſalvation, and the main ſtreſs of chriſtianity is to be laid there. And therefore whatever reaſon can be aſſigned, why God ſhould provide for the *infallible* ſecurity of our faith, is much ſtronger, why an equal proviſion ſhould be made to ſecure holineſs, and obedience of life; becauſe without *this* faith cannot *infallibly* attain its *end,* which is *the ſalvation of our ſouls.* But *this* it is granted God hath not done, and experience ſhews it; and therefore it is unreaſonable to ſuppoſe that he hath done the other. It is ſufficient, that in both kinds he hath done that which is ſufficient to make us capable of happineſs, if we be not wanting to ourſelves; the reſt he hath left to the ſincerity of our endeavours; expecting we on our part, *ſhould work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling,* and *give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure.* And if God hath made ſuch proviſion by the Goſpel, for all that enjoy the light and advantage of it, that none can miſcarry without their own fault; then both his goodneſs and wiſdom are ſufficiently acquitted, without an *infallible guide and judge* in matters of faith; and that irreverent way of arguing in the *canon law* might well have been ſpared; that of neceſſity there muſt be *an infallible judge of* controverſies in religion; *aliter dominus non videretur fuiſſe diſcretus, otherwiſe God would not ſeem to have ordered matters diſcreetly.*

But what *infallible* ſecurity ſoever they have in the *church of Rome,* as to matters of faith, they are certainly the worſt provided of wholſom and ſafe directions for the conſciences and lives of men, of any church in the world. No religion that I know of in the world, ever had ſuch lewd and ſcandalous caſuiſts. Witneſs the moral divinity of the *Jeſuits,* which hath been ſo expoſed to the world, not only by thoſe of *our* religion, but by their own writers alſo. Nor is this miſchief only confined to *that order*; their caſuiſts in general, and even the more ancient of them, who writ before the *order* of *Jeſuits* appeared in the world, have given ſuch a liberty, and looſe, to great immorality in ſeveral kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the beſt and pureſt religion in the world. Inſomuch that Sir *Thomas More* himſelf, who was a great zealot for that religion, could not forbear to make a loud complaint of it, and to paſs this ſevere cenſure upon the generality of their caſuiſts: "That their great buſineſs ſeemed to be, not to keep men "from ſin, but to teach them *quàm propè ad peccatum liceat accedere ſine peccato*; how "near to ſin they might lawfully come without ſinning." In the mean time the conſciences of men are like to be well directed, when inſtead of giving men plain rules for government of their hearts and lives, and clear reſolutions of the material doubts, which frequently occur in human life, they intangle them in niceties and endleſs ſcrupuloſities, teaching them to ſplit hairs in divinity, and how with great art and cunning they may avoid the committing of any ſin, and yet come as near to it as poſſible. This is a thing of a moſt dangerous conſequence to the ſouls of men; and if men be but once encouraged to paſs to the utmoſt bounds of what is lawful, the next ſtep will be into that which is unlawful.

So that unleſs *faith without works will ſave men*, notwithſtanding the *infallible* ſecurity which they pretend to give men of a ſound and right belief (if it were really as much as they talk of) the ſalvation of men would ſtill be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and ſafer directions for a good life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the caſuiſtical writings of that church; eſpecially if we conſider that the ſcriptures are lock'd up from the people in an unknown tongue, where the ſureſt and plaineſt directions for a good life are moſt plentifully to be had; inſomuch, that a man had better want all the volumes of caſuiſtical divinity, that ever were written in the world, than to be without the *Bible*; by the diligent ſtudying of which book alone, he may ſooner learn the way to heaven, than by all the books in the world without it.

Fifthly and *laſtly*, This proviſion which God hath made, is, when all is done, as good a ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in religion, as *an infallible church* could give, if there were one; and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to controverſies in religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary that they ſhould be prevented, and have an end put to them: And theſe are the two great reaſons why *an infallible judge* is ſo importunately demanded and inſiſted upon. I ſhall ſpeak to *theſe* diſtinctly, and ſeverally; but becauſe they will require a longer diſcourſe than the time will allow, I ſhall not enter upon them at preſent, but refer them to another opportunity.

SERMON XXXV.

The Third Sermon on this text.

Honeſty the beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous Miſtakes in Religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.

WHEN I made entrance into theſe words, I propoſed from this *text*,

Firſt, To ſhew that an honeſt and ſincere mind, and a hearty deſire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the greateſt ſecurity and beſt preſervative againſt dangerous errors and miſtakes in matters of religion.

In the next place I proceeded to remove an *objection*, to which my diſcourſe upon this ſubject might ſeem liable. Some perhaps might aſk, Is every good man then ſecure from all error and miſtake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honeſt heart, and a weak head do often meet together? For anſwer to this, I laid down ſeveral *propoſitions*.

By the *laſt* of which I ſhewed, that God hath made abundant proviſion for our ſecurity from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, both by *the infallible rule* of the holy ſcripture, and by ſufficient *means of inſtruction* to help us to underſtand this rule, and by his *infallible promiſe of aſſiſting us*, if with honeſt minds, and a due diligence we apply ourſelves to the underſtanding of this rule, and the uſe of theſe means. And *this*, I told you, was in all reſpects a better ſecurity, and more likely to conduct us ſafe to heaven, than any *infallible church* whatſoever; and that for *five* reaſons; *four* of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the *fifth*, and laſt, *viz.*

Becauſe this proviſion which I have ſhewn God hath made, is both as good a ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in religion, as an *infallible church* could give, if there were *one*: And it is likewiſe as good a way to prevent and put an end to controverſies in religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary they ſhould be prevented, or have an end put to them.

And *theſe* are the *two* great reaſons why *an infallible judge* is ſo importunately demanded, and inſiſted upon. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe *two* points diſtinctly and ſeverally.

Firſt, Becauſe this is as good a ſecurity againſt fatal errors and miſtakes in religion, as *an infallible church* could give, if there were *one*. For an *infallible church*, if there were ſuch an one upon earth, could not *infallibly* ſecure particular Chriſtians againſt errors in faith, any other way, than by the definition and declaration of thoſe who are *infallible* in that church. And there are but *three* that pretend to it, either the pope; or a general council; or the pope and a general council agreeing in the ſame definitions. Not the pope by himſelf, nor the general council without the pope; becauſe the church which pretends to *infallibility*, is not agreed, that either of theſe alone is *infallible*, and therefore their definitions can be no certain, much leſs *infallible* foundation of faith; no, not to that church which pretends to *infallibility*. So that if there be an *infallible oracle* in that church, it muſt be the pope and council in conjunction, or the definition of a council confirmed by the pope. Now in that caſe, either the council was *infallible* in its definitions, before they had the pope's confirmation, or not. If the council was *infallible* in its definitions, before they had the pope's confirmation; then the council alone, and of itſelf was *infallible* (which a great part of the church of *Rome* deny) and then it needed not the pope's confirmation to make it *infallible*: Or elſe a general council is not *infallible* in its definitions, before they receive the pope's confirmation; and then the pope's confirmation cannot make it ſo: For that which was not *infallibly* defined by the council, cannot be made *infallible* by the pope's confirmation.

But there is another difficulty yet: It is a maxim generally received, and that even in the *Roman church*, "That the definitions of a general council, confirmed by the pope, "are not obligatory, unleſs they be received by the univerſal church." From whence theſe *two* great inconveniencies will unavoidably follow.

I. That no man is obliged to believe ſuch definitions, 'till he certainly know that they are received by the univerſal church; which how he ſhould certainly, much leſs infallibly know, I cannot underſtand; unleſs he either ſpeak with all the Chriſtians in the world, or the repreſentatives of all particular churches return back and meet again in council, to declare, that the univerſal church hath received their definitions; which I think was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the definitions of a general council confirmed by the pope, are not *infallible*, till they be received by the univerſal church. For if they were *infallible* without that, they would be obligatory without it; becauſe an *infallible* definition, if we know it to be ſo, lays an obligation to believe it, whether it be received by the univerſal church, or not. And if ſuch definitions are not *infallible* till they be received by the univerſal church, they cannot become *infallible* afterwards; becauſe if the definitions were not *infallible* before, they cannot be received as ſuch by the univerſal church, nor by the mere reception of them, be made to be *infallible* definitions, if they were not ſo before.

But if we ſhould paſs over all theſe difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is ſuppoſing the definitions of general councils confirmed by the pope to be *infallible*, particular Chriſtians cannot be ſecured *infallibly* from error without the knowledge of thoſe definitions. And there are but *two* ways imaginable of conveying this knowledge to them: Either by the living voice of their particular paſtors, whom they are implicitly to believe in theſe matters; but particular paſtors are *fallible* (as they themſelves grant) and therefore their words can neither be an *infallible* foundation of faith, or an *infallible* means of conveying it; and it is unreaſonable, *they* ſay, for men that own themſelves to be *fallible*, to require an implicit belief to be given to them: Or elſe the knowledge of the definitions of councils muſt be conveyed to particular Chriſtians by writing; and if ſo, then there will only be *an infallible rule*, but no living *infallible judge*. And if an *infallible rule* will ſerve the turn: we have the ſcriptures which we are ſure are *infallible*, and therefore at leaſt as good as any other *rule*. But they ſay that the definitions of councils give us an *infallible* interpretation of ſcripture, and therefore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the definitions of councils ſometimes alſo need explication, that we may know the certain ſenſe of them, without which we cannot know the doctrines defined? Yes certainly, they need explication as much as ſcripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and ſtill are, great differences among thoſe of their own church about the meaning of them. And if the explications of general councils need themſelves to be explained, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before: For differences about the meaning of the definitions of general councils, make as great difficulties and uncertainties in faith as the differences about the meaning of ſcripture.

Well, but the people have the living voice of their particular paſtors to explain the definitions of councils to them. But this does not help the matter neither, for theſe *two* reaſons.

1. Becauſe particular paſtors have no authority to explain the definitions of general councils. The council of *Trent* hath, by expreſs decree, reſerved to the pope, and to him only, the power to explain the definitions of the council, if any difference ariſe about the meaning of them. So that if there be any difference about the true ſenſe and meaning of any of the definitions of the council, particular paſtors have no authority to explain them; and where there is no doubt or difference about the meaning of them, there is no occaſion for the explication of them.

2. But ſuppoſe they had authority to explain them, this can be no *infallible* ſecurity to the people, that they explain them right; both becauſe particular paſtors are *fallible*; and likewiſe becauſe we ſee in experience, that they differ in their explications; witneſs the biſhop of *Condom*'s *expoſition* of the catholick faith, and of the definitions of the council of *Trent*, which is in many material points very different from that of *Bellarmine*, and many other famous doctors of that church. And which is more, witneſs the many differences betwixt *Ambroſius*, *Catharinus*, and *Dominicus à Soto*, about the definitions of that council, in which they were both preſent, and heard the debates, and themſelves bore a great part in them. Now if they who were preſent at the framing of the definitions of that council cannot agree about the meaning of them, much leſs can it be expected from thoſe that were abſent.

Secondly, This proviſion which I have mentioned, is likewiſe as good a way to prevent and put an end to controverſies in religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary they ſhould be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any *infallible church* would be, if there were one: And this is another reaſon why *an infallible church* is ſo much inſiſted upon, that there may be ſome way and means for a final deciſion of controverſies, which the ſcriptures cannot be, becauſe they are only *a dead rule*, which can end no controverſy without a *living judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occaſions.

It is not neceſſary that all controverſies in religion ſhould either be prevented, or decided: This the church which pretends to be *infallible*, cannot pretend to have done; becauſe there are manifold controverſies, even in the church of *Rome* herſelf, concerning matters of religion, which ſtill remain undecided; and in their commentaries upon ſcripture, many differences about the ſenſe of ſeveral texts concerning which ſhe hath not thought fit to give an *infallible* interpretation. And where their popes, and ſeveral of their general councils, have thought fit to meddle with ſcripture, they have applied and interpreted texts more improperly and abſurdly, than even their private doctors. And, which is more, in differences about points of faith, which are pretended on both ſides to be fundamental, this church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her infallible deciſion, after two hundred years brangling about them. For inſtance, in that fierce and long difference about *the immaculate conception of the bleſſed Virgin*, which, on both ſides, is pretended to be an *article of faith*, and for which, contrary revelations of their canoniz'd ſaints are ſo frequently pretended; and yet neither pope, nor general council, have thought fit to exert their *infallibility* for the deciſion of this controverſy. So that if their church had this talent of *infallibility* ever committed to them, they have with *the ſlothful ſervant laid it up in a napkin*; and according to our Saviour's rule have long ſince forfeited it, for not making uſe of it.

And whereas it is pretended, that the ſcripture is but *a dead rule*, which can end no controverſies without a *living judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occaſions; the ſame objection lies againſt *them*, unleſs a general council which is *their living judge*, were always ſitting. For the definitions of their councils in writing are liable to the ſame, and greater objections, than the written rule of the ſcriptures.

The ſum of all is this. In differences about leſſer matters, mutual charity and forbearance will ſecure the peace of the church, though the differences remain undecided; and in greater matters, an *infallible rule* ſearched into with an honeſt mind, and due diligence, and with the help of good inſtruction, is more likely to extinguiſh and put an end to ſuch differences, than any *infallible judge*, if there were one; becauſe an humble and honeſt mind is more likely to yield to reaſon, than a perverſe and cavilling temper is to ſubmit to the ſentence of an *infallible judge*, unleſs it were back'd with an *inquiſition*. The church of *Rome* ſuppoſeth herſelf *infallible*, and yet notwithſtanding that, ſhe finds that ſome queſtion and deny her *infallibility*, and then her ſentence ſignifies nothing. And of thoſe who own it, many diſpute the ſenſe and meaning of her ſentence; and whether they deny the *infallibility* of her ſentence, or diſpute the ſenſe of it, in neither of theſe caſes will it prove effectual to the deciding of any difference.

But after all this proviſion which we pretend God hath made for honeſt and ſincere minds, do we not ſee that men fall into dangerous and damnable errors, who yet cannot, without great uncharitableneſs, be ſuppoſed not to be ſincerely deſirous to know the truth, and to do the will of God?

To this I ſhall briefly return theſe *two* things.

I. That the ſame errors are not equally damnable to all. The innocent and (humanly ſpeaking) almoſt invincible prejudices of education in ſome perſons even againſt a fundamental truth; the different capacities of men, and the different means of conviction afforded to them; the greater and leſſer degrees of obſtinacy, and a faulty will in oppoſing the truths propoſed to them; all theſe, and perhaps ſeveral other conſiderations beſides, may make a great difference in the guilt of mens errors, and the danger of them.

II. When all is done, the matter muſt be left to God, who only knoweth the hearts of all the children of men. We cannot ſee into the hearts of men, nor know all their circumſtances, and how they may have provoked God to forſake them, and give them up to error and deluſion, *becauſe they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be ſaved*. And as on the one hand God will conſider all mens circumſtances, and the diſadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the truth, and make allowance to men for their invincible errors, and forgive them upon a general repentance: So on the other hand, he who ſees the inſincerity of men, and that the errors of their underſtandings did proceed from groſs faults of their lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if men be honeſt and ſincere, God, who hath ſaid, *if any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine*, will certainly be as good as his word.

It now remains only to draw ſome *inferences* from this diſcourſe, and they ſhall be theſe *three*.

Firſt, from this *text*, and what hath been diſcourſed upon it, we may infer how ſlender and ill-grounded the pretence of the church of *Rome* to *infallibility* is; whether they place it in the pope, or in a general council, or in both. The laſt is the moſt general opinion; and yet it is hard to underſtand how *infallibility* can reſult from the pope's confirmation of a general council, when neither the council was *infallible* in framing its definitions, nor the pope in confirming them. If the council were *infallible* in framing them, then they needed no confirmation: If they were not, then *infallibility* is only in the pope that confirms them, and then it is the pope only that is *infallible*. But no man that reads theſe words of our Saviour, *If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine*, would ever imagine that the biſhop of *Rome* (whoever he ſhall happen to be) was ſecured from all fatal errors in matters of faith, much leſs that he were endowed with an *infallible* ſpirit, in judging what doctrines are from God, and what not. For it cannot be denied, but that many of their popes have been notoriouſly wicked and vicious in their lives: Nay, *Bellarmine* himſelf acknowledgeth, that for a ſucceſſion of fifty popes together, there was not one pious and virtuous man that ſat in that chair; and ſome of their popes have been condemned and depoſed for *hereſy*; and yet for all this, the pope, and the governing part of that church, would bear the world in hand that he is *infallible*. But if this ſaying of our Saviour be true, *that if any man will do his will, he ſhall know of his doctrine, whether it be of God*; then every honeſt man that ſincerely deſires to do the will of God, hath a fairer pretence to *infallibility*, and a clearer text for it, than is to be found in the whole Bible for the *infallibility* of the biſhop of *Rome*. What would the church of *Rome* give, that there were but as expreſs a *text* in ſcripture for the *infallibility* of their popes, as this is for the ſecurity of every good man, in his judgment of doctrines; which makes *infallibility* needleſs? What an inſufferable noiſe, and what endleſs triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where ſaid in the Bible, That if any man be biſhop of *Rome*, and ſit in St. *Peter*'s chair, *he ſhall know of my doctrine whether it be of God?* Had there been but ſuch a *text* as this, we ſhould never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of *texts*, and their remote and blind inferences, from *Paſce*

Oves, and *ſuper hanc petram*; *feed my ſheep*; and *upon this rock will I build my church*; to prove the pope's *infallibility*. And yet no man of ſenſe or reaſon ever extended the text I am ſpeaking to, ſo far as to attempt to prove from it the *infallibility* of every good man; but only his ſecurity from fatal errors and miſtakes in religion. The largeſt promiſes that are made in ſcripture of ſecurity from error and miſtake about divine things, are made to good men, who ſincerely deſire to do the will of God. And if this be ſo, we muſt conclude ſeveral popes to have been the fartheſt from *infallibility* of any men in the world. And indeed there is not a more compendious way to perſuade men that the chriſtian religion is a *fable*, than to ſet up a lewd and vicious man for the oracle of it.

Nay, I will go farther yet; that there are no other promiſes made in ſcripture, of direction or aſſiſtance, or ſecurity from miſtake, to any church; but the ſame are made in as full and expreſs terms to every good man that ſincerely deſires to know the truth, and to practiſe it. Is it promiſed to the church, or to the paſtors of it, *I will be with you always?* And hath not our Saviour promiſed the ſame to every one that is obedient to his word, *John* xiv. 23. *If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him?* And does not the Apoſtle apply the ſame promiſe to every good Chriſtian, *Heb.* xiii. 5. *I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee?* For where is the difference between theſe expreſſions? *I will be with you*, and *I will make my abode with him? I will be with you always*, and *I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee?* is it promiſed to the church, that *the Spirit ſhall lead her into all truth?* And is not the ſame promiſe made to every good man? *John* xiv. 21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, ſhall be loved of my father; and I will love him, and I will manifeſt myſelf to him*; that is, God will reveal his will to thoſe that love him, and keep his commandments. Hath God promiſed *to build his church upon a rock?* And doth not our Saviour uſe the ſame metaphor concerning every man that doth the will of God? *Matth.* vii. 24. *Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, is like a wiſe man that built his houſe upon a rock.* So that if *to be built upon a rock* ſignifies *infallibility*, it belongs to every good man, who ſincerely practiſeth what he knows, as much as to any church.

When men are enabled by God to work miracles for the confirmation of the doctrines which they deliver, there is great reaſon to believe that they are *infallibly* aſſiſted in the delivery of thoſe doctrines: But without this, 'tis the vaineſt thing in the world, for any perſon or church to pretend to it; becauſe they offer no evidence fit to ſatisfy any man, that they are ſo aſſiſted: And I do not hear that the pope, among all his privileges, does pretend to the power of miracles.

Secondly, From hence likewiſe we may infer the great reaſon of error and infidelity in the world. If any man be an infidel, it is not the fault of his underſtanding but of his will; it is not becauſe there is not ſufficient evidence that the chriſtian religion is from God, but becauſe mens intereſts and luſts make them partial and incompetent judges of matters of religion. The evidence of the chriſtian religion is ſuch, as recommends it to every man's reaſon and conſcience; ſo that (as St. *Paul* argues) *if the Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, leſt the light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, who is the image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them*, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

If men did but ſtand indifferent for the entertainment of truth, and were not ſwayed by the intereſt of any luſt or paſſion, I am confident that no man that hath the Goſpel fairly propoſed to him, would continue an infidel. If men did but truly live up to the principles of natural religion, they would eaſily be convinced, that the chriſtian religion, which is ſo ſuitable thereto, is from God.

Thirdly and *laſtly*, What hath been ſaid, is a great argument and encouragement to obedience, and holineſs of life. Do we deſire not to be miſtaken about the mind of God? Let us heartily endeavour to do his will. If we would not be ſeduced by the error of the wicked, let us take heed of their vicious practices. The beſt way certainly to preſerve a right judgment in matters of religion, is to take great care of a good life. God's goodneſs is ſuch, that he will not ſuffer any man's judgment to be betrayed into a damnable error, without ſome vice and fault of his will. The principles of natural religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our minds, ſo that no man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be miſtaken about them; and as for thoſe revelations which God hath made of himſelf to the world, he hath been pleaſed to accompany them with ſo much evidence, that an honeſt and ſincere mind may eaſily diſcern them from error, and impoſture. So our Saviour hath aſſured us, *That if any man deſire to do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.*

On the other hand, if we ſee any oppoſe the clear truth, or depart from it and embrace groſs errors and deluſions, we may almoſt certainly conclude, that there is ſome worldly intereſt or luſt at the bottom of it. So our Saviour has likewiſe told us, *that the* reaſon why *men love darkneſs rather than light, is, becauſe their deeds are evil; and every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be* reproved. I will conclude this whole diſcourſe with St. *Peter*'s exhortation, the 2d of *Pet.* iii. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things before, beware, leſt ye alſo being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. To him be glory, both now and for ever.* Amen.

SERMON XXXVI.

The Nature of Covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

AMONG all the irregular appetites of men, there is none that is more common and unreaſonable, and of a more univerſal bad influence upon the hearts and lives of men, than this of *covetouſneſs*; and therefore in ſpeaking of this vice, I ſhall ſtrike at the root of a great many others; even of apoſtaſy from God's truth and religion, of which covetouſneſs, and the love of this preſent world, is one of the moſt common cauſes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the cure of this great diſtemper of mens minds, I ſhall in ſo doing remove that, which is the cauſe and occaſion of a great part of the evils and miſchiefs which are in the world. And to this end I have pitched upon theſe words of our bleſſed Saviour to his hearers; *And he ſaid unto them, take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

In which words are theſe *three* things obſervable:

Firſt, The *manner* of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware*; he doubles it, to ſhew the great need and concernment of it.

Secondly, The matter of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers againſt, and that is *covetouſneſs: take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.*

Thirdly, The reaſon of this caution, *becauſe a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* Human life is ſuſtained by a little, and therefore abundance is not neceſſary, either to the ſupport, or comfort of it. 'Tis not a great eſtate and vaſt poſſeſſions that make a man happy in this world; but a mind that is equal to its condition, whatever it be.

Firſt, The *manner* of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware.* This is a peculiar kind of caution, and no where elſe, or upon any other occaſion that I know of, uſed in ſcripture; in which, for the greater emphaſis and weight, the words of caution are doubled, as if the matter were of ſo much concernment, that no caution about it could be too much; to ſignify to us both the great danger of this ſin of *covetouſneſs*, and the great care men ought to uſe to preſerve themſelves from it.

I. The great danger of this ſin; how apt we are to fall into this vice, and of how pernicious a conſequence it is to thoſe in whom it reigns.

1. How apt we are to fall into this vice: And excepting thoſe vices which are immediately founded in a man's natural temper and conſtitution, there is none that men have a more univerſal propenſion to, than this of *covetouſneſs*. For there are *two* things which human nature does more eſpecially deſire to be ſecured againſt, which are *want* and *contempt*: and riches ſeem to be a certain remedy againſt both theſe evils. And becauſe men think they can never be ſufficiently ſecured againſt theſe, therefore their deſire of riches grows endleſs and inſatiable; ſo that unleſs men be very jealous and watchful over themſelves, this deſire will grow upon them, and enlarge itſelf beyond all bounds.

2. As men are very apt to fall into this vice, ſo is it of very pernicious conſequence to thoſe in whom it reigns. The miſchief of it is very great and very extenſive: So *Paul* tells us, 1 *Tim.* vi. 8, 9, 10. where he preſſeth men to be contented with a ſmall competency of the things of this life, becauſe of the great danger and miſchief of a covetous mind; *having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich* (that is, they that are bent and reſolved upon being rich) *fall into temptation and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.* But this I ſhall ſpeak more fully to, when I come to ſhew the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of this vice.

II. This earneſt kind of caution, as it ſignifies the great danger of this ſin of *covetouſneſs*, ſo likewiſe the great care that men ought to uſe to preſerve themſelves from it; for the greater the danger is in any kind, ſo much the greater care ſhould be uſed for the avoiding of it. Men are not ſo ſolicitouſly concerned to defend themſelves againſt a ſlight miſchief; but when a terrible one threatens us, we ſhould be continually upon our guard againſt it, and ſummon all our ſtrength and force to reſiſt it. Thus much for the *manner* of the caution.

I proceed to the *ſecond* thing to be conſidered in the text, *viz.* the *matter* of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers againſt, and that is *covetouſneſs*; *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* And in ſpeaking of this, I ſhall conſider theſe *two* things.

I. Wherein the nature of this vice conſiſts.

II. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of it. I ſhall be large in both.

I. For the nature of this vice of *covetouſneſs*. The ſhorteſt deſcription that I can can give of it is this; that it is *an inordinate deſire and love of riches*; but when this deſire and love are *inordinate*, is not ſo eaſy to be determined. And therfore that we may the better underſtand what this ſin of *covetouſneſs* is, which our Saviour doth ſo earneſtly caution againſt, it will be requiſite to conſider more particularly wherein the vice and fault of it doth conſiſt; that whilſt we are ſpeaking againſt *covetouſneſs*, we may not under that general word condemn any thing that is commendable or lawful. To the end then that we may the more clearly and diſtinctly underſtand wherein the nature of this vice doth conſiſt, I ſhall,

Firſt, Endeavour to ſhew what is not condemned under this name of *covetouſneſs*, either in ſcripture or according to right reaſon: And,

Secondly, What is condemned by either of theſe, as a plain inſtance or branch of this ſin.

Firſt, What things are not condemned under the name of *covetouſneſs*, either in ſcripture, or according to right reaſon, which yet have ſome appearance of it; namely, theſe *three* things.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this preſent life.

2. Not a regular induſtry and diligence for the obtaining of them: Nor

3. Every degree of love and affection to them. I mention theſe *three*, becauſe they may all ſeem to be condemned by ſcripture, as parts or degrees of this vice, but really are not.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this preſent life. This indeed ſeems to be condemned in ſcripture as a branch of *covetouſneſs*; namely, in our Saviour's ſermon upon the mount, *Matth.* vi. 25. *Take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye ſhall put on.* Here our Saviour ſeems to forbid all care, even about the neceſſaries of life, meat, and drink, and clothing, much more about the delights and conveniences of it. But this is not abſolutely,

and in ordinary caſes intended by our Saviour to be condemned, as I ſhall ſhew by and by under the next head.

2. Neither is a regular induſtry and diligence for the obtaining of theſe things condemned in ſcripture; though this alſo ſeems to be prohibited by our Saviour in the ſame chapter, ver. 26. *Behold the fowls of the air, for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them*; and ver. 28. *Why take ye thought for raiment? Conſider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin.* In which words our Saviour ſeems to intimate, that we ought to depend upon the providence of God for food and raiment, and to uſe no more induſtry for the obtaining of them, than the *fowls of the air* do, or *the lilies of the field:* And the ſame may ſeem to be collected out of this chapter of St. *Luke:* for after our Saviour had in my *text* cautioned them againſt covetouſneſs, and ſpoken to them a parable to that purpoſe, of *a rich man who enlarged his barns, and laid up goods for many years,* he infers from thence, ver. 22. that men ſhould take no thought for the things of this life, nor uſe any induſtry about them; *and he ſaid unto his diſciples, therefore I ſay unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat; neither for the body, what ye ſhall put on.*

Now to avoid all inconvenience from our Saviour's words, I think that it is commonly ſaid by interpreters, that he does here only condemn a diſtruſtful and anxious care about the things of this life, and an over-ſolicitous induſtry and diligence for the obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent care, and regular induſtry about theſe things: And this were very well ſaid, if it would agree with the ſcope and deſign of our Saviour's diſcourſe; but the inſtances which he gives of *the fowls of the air,* and *the lilies of the field,* which are ſufficiently provided for without any care and induſtry of theirs, and which he ſeems to ſet before us for a pattern, *behold* (ſays he) *the fowls of the air,* I ſay theſe inſtances which he gives, ſeem to exclude even all regular and ordinary care and diligence about theſe things.

What ſhall we ſay then, that our Saviour intended by his religion to take men off from all labour and induſtry in their callings? This ſeems to be unreaſonable; and indeed ſo it certainly were, if our Saviour had given this for a ſtanding and ordinary rule to all Chriſtians; and not only ſo, but contrary to the Apoſtles doctrine, who conſtantly charged Chriſtians to labour with great diligence in their callings, that they might be able to provide for themſelves, and their families.

But this diſcourſe of our Saviour's was not intended for a general and ſtanding rule to all Chriſtians; but only deſigned for his diſciples, to take *them* off from all care about the things of this life, that they might attend upon his perſon, and wholly give up themſelves to that work to which he had called them. And therefore St. *Luke* takes notice, that after he had cautioned his hearers in general againſt *covetouſneſs,* he applies himſelf particularly to his diſciples, and tells them that he would have them ſo far from this vice of *covetouſneſs,* that they ſhould not ſo much as uſe that ordinary care and induſtry about the things of this life, which is not only lawful, but neceſſary for men in all ordinary caſes, ver. 22. *And he ſaid unto his diſciples, therefore I ſay unto you, take no thought for your life, what you ſhall eat.* And this agrees very well with the direction which our Saviour gave to his diſciples, when he firſt ſent them forth to preach, *Matth.* x. 9. *Provide neither gold, nor ſilver, nor braſs in your purſes, neither coat or ſcrip*; which no man ever underſtood as a general law to all Chriſtians, but as a particular precept to the Apoſtles at that time.

And if this be our Saviour's meaning, there is then no reaſon to think that this caution againſt *covetouſneſs* does forbid men to uſe a provident care and regular induſtry about the things of this life.

3. Nor is every degree of love and affection to the things of this world condemned in ſcripture, as any branch, or part of this vice of *covetouſneſs*; but ſuch a love of the things of this world as is truly conſiſtent with the love of God, and a due and a ſerious care of our ſouls, is allowed both by ſcripture and reaſon. St. *John* indeed ſeems to condemn all love of the world, and of the things of it, as utterly inconſiſtent with the love of God, 1 *John* ii. 15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him:* But this is according to the *Hebrew* phraſe and manner of ſpeaking, to forbid things *abſolutely,* which are to be underſtood only *comparatively.* So *Matth.* vi. 19. *Lay not up for yourſelves treaſures upon earth; but lay up for yourſelves treaſures in heaven;*

i. e. be not ſo ſolicitous for the good things of this world, as for the glory and happineſs of the next. And *Luke* xii. 4. *Be not afraid of them that kill the body*; that is, fear *them* not ſo much as *him that can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell:* And *Luke* xiv. 26. *If any man come unto me, and hate not his father and mother, and all that he hath*; that is, if he do not love me more than all theſe things, *he cannot be my diſciple:* And *John* vi. 27. *Labour not for the meat which periſheth, but for that which endureth to everlaſting life*; that is, labour not ſo much for the one as for the other, be not ſo ſolicitous about the things of this life, as about the great concernments of eternity. So likewiſe *Coloſſ.* iii. 2. *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth*; *i. e.* ſet them more on things above, than on earthly things. So here, *love not the world, neither the things of the world*; that is, do not over-value them, do not love them ſo much as not to be able to part with them for Chriſt; *for if any man* thus *love the world,* he does not love God as he ought. So that when the ſcripture commands us *not to love the world,* this is to be underſtood *comparatively,* that we ſhould not love theſe things in compariſon of God, and the great concernments of another world: but it does not forbid us to love theſe things in a due degree, and with a due ſubordination to thoſe things which are more excellent, and of infinitely greater concernment to us. For nothing can be more inconſiſtent than to recommend to men diligence in their worldly callings and employments (as the ſcripture frequently does) and that in order to the attaining of the good things of this life; and yet to forbid us to love theſe things at all. For if men have no degree of love to them, the beſt argument to diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Beſides that we are commanded in ſcripture to be thankful to God for beſtowing on us the bleſſings of this life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any man love the giver, for beſtowing ſuch gifts upon him, which, if he do as he ought, he muſt not love?

You ſee then what thoſe things are, which the ſcripture does not condemn as any branch or degree of this vice of *covetouſneſs*; a provident care, and a regular induſtry, and ſuch a degree of love to the things of this world, as is conſiſtent with the love of God, and the care of our ſoul.

Secondly, I come now to ſhew what is condemned in ſcripture under the name of *covetouſneſs*; and by this we ſhall beſt underſtand wherein the nature of this ſin doth conſiſt. Now *covetouſneſs* is a word of a large ſignification, and comprehends in it moſt of the irregularities of mens minds, either in *deſiring,* or *getting,* or in *poſſeſſing,* and *uſing* an eſtate. I ſhall ſpeak to each of theſe ſeverally.

I. *Covetouſneſs* in the *deſire* of riches, conſiſts in an eager and unſatiable deſire after the things of this world. This the ſcripture condemns, though it be free from injuſtice, as it ſeldom happens to be. This inſatiable deſire of wealth, God plainly condemns by his prophet, *Iſa.* v. 8. *Wo unto them that join houſe to houſe, and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midſt of the earth.* And this is that which our Saviour here in the *text* ſeems to have a more particular reſpect to, when he cautions men againſt the ſin of *covetouſneſs,* as appears both from the reaſon which he gives of this caution, and from the parable whereby he illuſtrates it. From the reaſon which he gives of this caution, *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs*; *for the life of man doth not conſiſt in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* As if he had ſaid, take great care to ſet ſome bounds to your deſires after the things of this world. For whatever men may imagine, it is certain in experience, that it is not the abundance of outward things which makes the life of man happy. *Wealth and content* do not always dwell together; nay ſo far from that, that perhaps they very ſeldom meet.

And the parable likewiſe which follows upon this caution, doth ſufficiently ſhew this to be our Saviour's meaning; for he illuſtrates what he was ſpeaking of, by a rich man whoſe deſire of wealth was never ſatisfied, but he was continually increaſing his eſtate and enlarging his barns, to make more room ſtill for his fruits, that he might *lay up goods in ſtore for many years.* The parable does not ſo much as intimate any indirect and unjuſt ways of gain, which this man uſed to increaſe his eſtate; but condemns his inſatiable deſire and thirſt after more; ſo that even *this* alone is *covetouſneſs,* and a great fault, though it were attended with no other; becauſe it is unreaſonable, and without end.

II. There is *covetouſneſs* likewiſe in *getting* an eſtate; and the vice or evil of this kind of *covetouſneſs* conſiſts chiefly in theſe *three* things.

1. In the uſe of unlawful and unjuſt ways to get or increaſe an eſtate. He is a *covetous man,* who by the greedineſs of gain, is tempted to do any unjuſt action, whether it

be in the way of fraud and deceit, or of violence and oppreſſion. And this perhaps is that which is moſt frequently in ſcripture called *covetouſneſs*. And this I take to be the meaning of the tenth commandment, *thou ſhalt not covet*; wherein is forbidden all unjuſt deſire of that which is another man's, and all unjuſt endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For ſo our Saviour renders it; *Mark* x. 19. where he ſays to the *young man* that came to be directed by him, *what good thing he ſhould do, that he might inherit eternal life*; *thou knoweſt the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not ſteal, do not bear falſe witneſs*; and then inſtead of the tenth commandment, *thou ſhalt not covet*, or rather by way of explication of it, he adds μὴ ἀποστερήσῃς, *defraud not*; as if he had ſaid in a word, be not injurous to thy neighbour in any kind, in deſiring or endeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the *Romans* in their laws were wont to comprehend thoſe crimes which had no proper name, by the general name of *ſtellionatus*, and *dolus malus*; ſo here in the *decalogue*, after God had inſtanced in the chief and moſt common ſorts of injuries which men are guilty of towards their neighbour, as *murder*, *adultery*, *theft*, *bearing of falſe witneſs*; he ſums up all the reſt, which could not ſo eaſily be reckoned particularly, in this ſhort and general prohibition, *thou ſhalt not covet*; that is, thou ſhalt not be injurious to thy neighbour in any kind; *in his wife, or ſervant, or houſe, or cattle, or any thing that is his*. *Covetouſneſs*, or any inordinate deſire of that which is our neighbour's, being commonly the root and parent of all thoſe kind of injuries.

And for the ſame reaſon St. *Matthew*, inſtead *of the tenth commandment*, puts this general precept, *thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*, as being the ſenſe of it in other words: *Matth*. xix. 18, 19. *thou ſhalt do no murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, honour thy father and thy mother, and thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*. And this command of *loving our neighbour as ourſelves*, our Saviour elſewhere tells us was the ſum of the duties of the *ſecond table*; and it is the ſame in ſenſe with that precept of our Saviour, *Matth*. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them*. That is, as thou wouldeſt have no man to be injurious to thee in any thing, ſo be not thou to any other man in any kind. And the Apoſtle, *Rom*. xiii. 8, 9, 10. ſhews us upon what account this general precept, *thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*, is the ſum of the *ſecond table*. *He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law*; *for this, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not kill, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, thou ſhalt not covet*; *and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, thou ſhall love thy neighbour as thyſelf*. And then he adds in the next words, *love worketh no ill to his neighbour*; *therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*. That is, he that truly loves his neighbour, will not be injurious to him in any kind: *Therefore love is the ſum of the law*.

The deſign of all this is to ſhew, that he that is injurious to his neighbour in his eſtate in any kind, is properly guilty of the ſin of *covetouſneſs*, which is forbidden in the *tenth commandment*. So that all arts of fraud and oppreſſion, whereby men endeavour to get and increaſe an eſtate by the injury of their neighbour, is a branch of the ſin of *covetouſneſs*.

2. The vice of *covetouſneſs* in *getting* wealth, does likewiſe conſiſt in an anxious and tormenting care about obtaining the things of this life. The regular and due temper of a man's mind about the things of this world, is to commit ourſelves to the providence of God in the uſe of honeſt and lawful endeavours, and to refer the ſucceſs of all to his good pleaſure; and whatſoever is beyond this, is a branch from the evil root of *covetouſneſs*. We diſtruſt the providence of God, when after we had uſed our beſt endeavours, and begged his bleſſing upon them, we torment ourſelves about the iſſue and event of things. And as this is ſinful, ſo it is vain, and to no purpoſe. Diligence in our buſineſs is the way to get an eſtate; but no man was ever the richer for tormenting himſelf, becauſe he is not ſo. The reaſon why men ſeek the things of this world, and take pains to get them, is to make life convenient and comfortable; and conſequently he that torments himſelf about the getting of theſe things, contradicts himſelf, in his own deſign, becauſe he makes his life *miſerable*, that he may make it *comfortable*.

3. The ſin of *covetouſneſs* in *getting*, conſiſts in ſeeking the things of this life, with the neglect of things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer concernment to us. He is a *covetous man*, who ſo minds the world, as to neglect God, and his ſoul; who is ſo buſy and intent upon making proviſion for this life, as to take no care of

the other; ſo concerned for a few days of his pilgrimage here, as to have no conſideration and regard for his eternal abode in another world. God allows us to provide for this life, and conſiders the neceſſities which do continually preſs us while we are in the body: but while we are making proviſion for theſe *dying bodies*, he expects that we ſhould remember that we have *immortal ſouls:* which ſince they are to have an endleſs duration in another world, ought to be provided for with far greater care. 'Tis an inordinate deſire of riches, when men ſo lay out all their care and induſtry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing elſe were to be regarded, as if no conſideration at all were to be had of another world, and of that better part of ourſelves which is to continue and live for ever. All deſires and endeavours after riches, which take men off from the buſineſs of religion, and the care of their ſouls, which allow men neither the leiſure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love God, and to ſerve him, are to be referred to the ſin of *covetouſneſs*, which is here condemned by our Saviour in the *text*.

III. There is *covetouſneſs* likewiſe in *poſſeſſing* or *uſing* an eſtate: And this conſiſts chiefly in theſe *three* things.

Firſt, When men are ſordid towards themſelves, and cannot find in their hearts to uſe and enjoy what they poſſeſs; are continually adding to their eſtate, without any deſign of enjoyment; and take infinite pains to raiſe a huge fortune, not that they may uſe it, but that they may be ſaid to have it. This is a degree of covetouſneſs even beyond that of the rich man in the parable after the *text:* for he, it ſeems, after he had *enlarged his barns* to his mind, and *laid up goods for many years*, deſigned at laſt to have *taken his eaſe*, and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten; *to have eat and drank, and to have been merry*; and this though it proved but a fooliſh deſign in the iſſue, he being *cut off in that very inſtant* when he was come to the point of ſatisfaction and enjoyment; yet it is infinitely more reaſonable, than to take great pains to get an eſtate with a full reſolution never to be the better for it.

Secondly, Men are *covetous* in *keeping an eſtate*, when they do not uſe it charitably; when they cannot find in their hearts to ſpare any thing out of their abundance, to the relief of thoſe who are in want. Though a man get an eſtate without *covetouſneſs*, and have an heart to enjoy it, yet ſo far he is *covetous*, as he is *uncharitable*. He loves money more than he ought, who having enough to ſpare, chooſeth rather to keep it, than to do good with it, and to uſe it to one of the principal ends for which God gives an eſtate.

Thirdly, They likewiſe are *covetous*, who place their chief truſt and happineſs in riches, who (as the expreſſion is, *Job* xxxi. 24.) *make gold their hope, and ſay to the fine gold, thou art my confidence.* And this is the reaſon why *covetouſneſs* is ſo often in ſcripture call'd *idolatry*; becauſe the *covetous* man ſets up his riches in the place of *God*, putting his truſt and confidence in them, and ſetting his whole heart upon them, loving them as he ſhould love *God only, with all his heart, and ſoul, and ſtrength:* And therefore *Mammon*, which ſignifies *riches*, is in ſcripture repreſented as a *deity*, and *the covetous man*, as a ſervant, or worſhipper of *Mammon*.

So that in ſcripture he is a *covetous man* who placeth his chief felicity in a great fortune and would venture to loſe any thing, rather than to part with *that*; who will quit his religion, and violate his conſcience, and run the hazard of his ſoul, rather than forfeit his eſtate, or the hopes of advancing it to his mind.

And this in times of trial and difficulty, is the great temptation to which the *covetous man* is expoſed. When a man may not only ſave himſelf, but get conſiderable advantage by departing from the truth; and in changing his religion, may have a good ſum of money to boot, or which is equal to it, a good place; this to a *covetous mind* is a very ſtrong temptation, and almoſt irreſiſtible. When error and deluſion can bid ſo high, and offer ſo good terms, no wonder if it gain ſome proſelytes among the *covetous* and *ambitious* part of mankind. This the Apoſtle gives warning of, as a great temptation to rich men in times of ſuffering, 1 *Tim.* vi. 9, 10. *They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a ſnare: for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while ſome have luſted after, they have erred from the faith.* The young man in the Goſpel is a ſad inſtance of this kind, who choſe rather to leave Chriſt, than to part with his great poſſeſſions. And ſuch a one was *Demas*, who *forſook the Apoſtles*, and *chriſtianity itſelf, to cleave to this preſent world.*

Thus I have done with the firſt thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, the nature of this vice, which our Saviour in the *text* cautions men ſo earneſtly againſt; *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* I ſhall now proceed in the *ſecond* place to ſhew the evil and unreaſonableneſs of this vice: But that ſhall be the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

SERMON XXXVII.

The Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

Luke xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

I Have made entrance into a diſcourſe upon theſe words, in which I told you there are *three* things obſervable.

Firſt, The *manner* of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware.*

Secondly, the *matter* of the caution, or the ſin which our Saviour here warns his hearers againſt, *take heed, and beware of covetouſneſs:* And

Thirdly, The *reaſon* of this caution, becauſe *a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

In diſcourſing of the *ſecond* of theſe, *viz.* the *matter* of the caution, I propoſed,

1. To conſider wherein the nature of this vice of *covetouſneſs* does conſiſt.

2. To ſhew the evil and unreaſonableneſs of it.

The *firſt* of theſe I have diſpatched, and now go on to the *ſecond*, *viz.* To ſhew the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of the vice of *covetouſneſs*.

Now *covetouſneſs* will appear to be very evil, and unreaſonable, upon theſe following accounts.

I. Becauſe it takes men off from religion, and the care of their ſouls.

II. Becauſe it tempts men to do many things which are inconſiſtent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

III. Becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable deſire.

IV. Becauſe the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in riches.

V. Becauſe riches do very often contribute very much to the miſery and infelicity of men.

Firſt, *Covetouſneſs* takes men off from religion, and the care of their ſouls. The *covetous man* is wholly intent upon this world; and his inordinate deſire after theſe things, makes him to neglect God, and the eternal concernments of his ſoul. He employs all his time, and care, and thoughts about theſe temporal things, and his vehement love and eager purſuit of theſe things ſteals away his heart from God, robs him of his time, and of all opportunities for his ſoul, and diverts him from all ſerious thoughts of another world, and the life to come. And the reaſon of this is that which our Saviour gives, *Matth.* vi. 24. *No man can ſerve two maſters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or elſe he will hold to the one, and deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God, and mammon.* No man can ſerve two maſters ſo different as God and the world are; becauſe they will give croſs commands, and enjoin contrary things. God calls upon us to mind the duties of his worſhip and ſervice, to have a ſerious regard to religion, and a diligent care of our ſouls: but the cares of the world, and the importunity of buſineſs, and an eager appetite of being rich, call us off from theſe divine and ſpiritual employments, or diſturb us in them. God calls upon us to be charitable to thoſe that are in want, to be willing to diſtribute, and ready to communicate to the neceſſities of our brethren: But our covetouſneſs pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all merciful and charitable inclinations in us. God calls us to ſelf-denial, and ſuffering for the ſake of him, and his truth, and commands us to prefer the keeping of faith and a good conſcience, to all worldly conſiderations whatſoever: but the world inſpires us with other thoughts, and whiſpers to us *to ſave ourſelves, not to be righteous over much,* and rather to truſt God with our ſouls, than men with our bodies and eſtates.

If we ſet our hearts and affections ſtrongly upon any thing, they will partake of the object which they are converſant about; for *where our treaſure is* (as our Lord hath told us) *there will our hearts be alſo.* If a great eſtate be our chief end and deſign, if riches be our treaſure, and our happineſs, our hearts will be found *among the ſtuff.* We cannot beſtow our affections freely upon *two* objects. We cannot intenſely love God, and the world; for no man can have *two* ultimate ends, *two* principal deſigns. Our *riches may increaſe*; but if we *ſet our hearts upon them*, and give them the chief place in our affections, we make them our Lord and maſter. Whatever we make our ultimate end, we give it a ſovereignty and empire over us; we put ourſelves under its dominion, and make ourſelves ſubject to all its commands. So that if *it bid us go, we muſt go; come, we muſt come; do this, we muſt do it; becauſe we are under authority:* The world is our maſter, and we are its ſlaves. Now he that is under the rule and dominion of this maſter, muſt withdraw his obedience from God, and in many caſes decline obedience to his laws.

This worldly covetous diſpoſition was that which made thoſe in the parable to make ſo many excuſes, when they were invited to the ſupper, *Luke* xiv. 18. *One had bought a farm, and he could not come: Another had bought ſo many yoke of oxen, and therefore he deſired to be excuſed.* Riches do ſo fill the covetous man's heart, and the cares of the world ſo poſſeſs his mind, that he hath no room left in his ſoul for any other gueſts: *Intus exiſtens prohibet alienum, that which is full already can receive no more.* The covetous man's heart is taken up with ſuch things as keep out God, and Chriſt, and better things. *If any man love the world, and the things of it*, to this degree, St. *John* tells us that *the love of the Father is not in him.* In the parable of the *ſower*, Matth. xiii. 7. our Saviour repreſents to us, *the cares of the world, which choke the word of God*, by *thorns which ſprung up among the ſeed, and ſtifled the growth of it.* The cares of the world will not ſuffer the word of God *to take deep root in our hearts*, and to have any permanent effect upon them: And, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 31. God gives this as a reaſon why the people of *Iſrael* would not hearken to the words of his prophet, becauſe their hearts were upon the world. *They come unto thee* (ſays God there to the prophet) *as the people cometh, and they ſit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they ſhew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetouſneſs.* A heart that is deeply engaged in the world, will ſtand out againſt all the invitations, and promiſes, and threatenings of God's word. When the word of God invites ſuch perſons, it is like making love to thoſe who have already fixed their hearts and affections elſewhere; the promiſes and threatenings of the Goſpel ſignify but very little to ſuch men, becauſe their hearts are ſet upon worldly things, and all their affections are bent that way; all their hopes and deſires are worldly; to be rich and abound in wealth; and all their fears are of poverty and loſs. Now ſuch a man can only be moved with the promiſes and threatenings of temporal things; for no promiſes have any effect upon us, but ſuch as are of ſome good, which we care for and value: nor are any threatenings apt to move us, but ſuch as are of ſome evil which we dread, and are afraid of. And therefore when eternal life, and the happineſs of another world, are offered to a worldly-minded man, he does not deſire it, he is not at all ſenſible of the value of it; the man's heart is full already of other hopes and deſires, and *the full ſoul loatheth the honey-comb.* Promiſe to ſuch a man the kingdom of heaven, and the pleaſures of God's preſence, and the joys of eternity, this does not ſignify to ſuch a man any good or happineſs that he is ſenſible of, or knows how to reliſh. And on the other hand, threaten him with the loſs of God, and an eternal ſeparation from that fountain of happineſs, and with the unſpeakable anguiſh and torments of a long eternity; theſe things, though they be terrible, yet they are at a diſtance, and the covetous man is inured to ſenſe, and is only to be moved with things preſent and ſenſible; he cannot extend his fears ſo far as another world, ſo long as he finds himſelf well and at eaſe, as to the things of this preſent life.

If we would affect ſuch a man, we muſt offer to his conſideration ſomething that is fit to work upon him; threaten him with breaking open his houſe, and rifling his coffers, and carrying away his full bags; with queſtioning his title to his eſtate, or ſtarting a precedent mortgage, or ſomething of the like nature: theſe things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you ſpeak intelligibly to him, and he underſtands what you mean: Tell him of a good bargain, or an advantageous purchaſe, offer him decently a good bribe, or give him notice of a young heir that may be circumvented, and drawn in, then you ſay ſomething to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the man may be tempted by ſuch offers and promiſes as theſe: But diſcourſe to him *with the tongue of men and Angels*, of the excellency of virtue and goodneſs, and of the neceſſity of it, to the obtaining of a glory and happineſs that ſhall neither have bounds nor end; and *lo! thou art unto him as a lovely ſong of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well upon an inſtrument; for he hears thy words, but he will not do them*; as the prophet expreſſeth it, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 32. Such diſcourſes as theſe they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious ſound, that vaniſheth into air, but leaves no impreſſion behind it. Perhaps even theſe dull and ſtupid kind of men are affected a little for the preſent with the livelineſs of the romance, and the poetical vein of the preacher; but theſe things *paſs away like a tale that is told*, but have no laſting effect upon them. So effectually doth *covetouſneſs* and *the love of this preſent world*, obſtruct all thoſe paſſages, through which the conſideration of religion and heavenly things ſhould enter into our minds.

Secondly, As covetouſneſs hinders men from religion, and takes them off from a due care of their ſouls; ſo it many times tempts and engageth men to do many things contrary to religion, and inconſiſtent with it: It is the natural ſource and fountain of a great many evils, and the parent of moſt of the worſt of vices. He that will engage deep in the world, muſt uſe much more guard and caution than moſt men do, to do it without ſin. How many temptations is the covetous man expoſed to in the *getting*, and in the *ſecuring* and in the *ſpending* and *enjoying* of a great eſtate? It is no eaſy task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to eſcape or reſiſt them, and yet each of theſe temptations brings him into the dangers of a great many ſins. For,

1. In the getting of an eſtate, he is expoſed to all thoſe vices which may ſeem to be ſerviceable to this deſign. Nothing has been the cauſe of more and greater ſins in the world, than *covetouſneſs*, and *making haſte to be rich*. It is *Solomon*'s obſervation, *Prov.* xxviii. 20. *He that maketh haſte to be rich, ſhall not be innocent*. He does not ſay he *cannot* be innocent, but he ſpeaks as if there were all the probability in the world that he will not prove to be ſo; but being in ſo much *haſte*, will almoſt unavoidably fall into a great many overſights and faults. And the *heathen* poet makes the ſame obſervation in more words:

Inde ferè ſcelerum cauſæ, nec plura venena
Miſcuit, aut ferro graſſatur ſæpiùs ullum
Humanæ mentis vitium, quàm ſæva cupido
Immodici Cenſûs: nam dives qui fieri vult,
Et citò vult fieri; ſed quæ reverentia legum,
Quis metus aut pudor eſt unquam properantis avari?

“This, ſays he, is the cauſe of moſt ſins: nor is there any vice of which the mind of man is capable, that hath been guilty of more murders and poiſonings, than a furious deſire of immoderate wealth; for he that *will be rich*, will *make haſte* to be ſo: And what reverence of laws, what fear of ſhame, was ever ſeen in any man that was in haſte to be rich?” And this is the ſenſe of what the Apoſtle ſays concerning this vice of *covetouſneſs*, this peremptory reſolution of being rich, 1 *Tim.* vi. 9, 10. *They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.* If this vice of *covetouſneſs* once reign in us, if we have once fixed our end, and ſet up this reſolution with ourſelves, that *we will be rich*, we ſhall then make every thing ſtoop and ſubmit to this deſign. A *covetous* man will make his principles and his conſcience to bend to his reſolution of being rich, and to bow to that intereſt. The eager deſire of riches makes men to purſue them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by falſhood and perjury, by undermining and over-reaching, by diſſembling and flattery, by corrupting and imbaſing of commodities, by falſe weights and meaſures, by taking fees with both hands, by making uſe of their power and wit to oppreſs and defraud their brother, by impoſing upon his ignorance and ſimplicity, or by making a prey of his poverty and neceſſity.

Covetouſneſs many times makes men cruel and unjuſt; nay, it makes them guilty of the worſt ſort of cruelty and oppreſſion. For (as one ſays well) the covetous man oppreſſeth his neighbour, not for any good to himſelf; for he does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; ſo that he is of that moſt hateful kind of beaſts of prey that kill other creatures, not to eat them, but that they may ſee them lie dead by them. Lions and wolves kill out of hunger; but the covetous man, like a ſerpent or ſcorpion, ſtings and bites others to death, not for his need, but for his pleaſure and recreation. *Covetouſneſs* is the parent of the moſt monſtrous ſins; becauſe it fixeth a man in a reſolution of getting an eſtate by any means. If falſeneſs and deceit, violence and oppreſſion will further this end; the earneſt deſire of the end tempts men to uſe any ſort of means whereby the end may be compaſſed; and though a man may have ſome averſeneſs from them at firſt, yet that wears off by degrees, and the ſtrong deſire of the end, reconciles a man at laſt to the love and liking of the means, how wicked and unwarrantable ſoever. *Covetouſneſs* tempted *Achan* to ſteal the accurſed thing, and *Gehazi* to lie to the prophet, and *Ahab* to oppreſs and murder *Naboth.* Nay, a ſmall ſum tempted the covetous mind of *Judas* to betray his maſter, and his Saviour. And how do many men every day ſtrain their conſciences to get an eſtate, and hazard their own ſouls for money; nay exchange their ſouls, which are of more value than the whole world, for a very ſmall portion of it?

II. There are likewiſe many other temptations which a covetous man is expoſed to in the *keeping* and *ſecuring* of an eſtate, when he hath got it. A covetous and worldly-minded man, when it comes to the trial, is in great danger of quitting his religion, and *making ſhipwreck of faith and a good conſcience.* When his eſtate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the truth; 'tis an hundred to one but in theſe circumſtances, he will chooſe rather to violate his conſcience, than to forfeit his eſtate. What the devil falſly ſaid of *Job*, is true of the covetous man, *he does not ſerve God for nought.* Upon theſe terms it was that Chriſt and the young man parted; *he had great poſſeſſions*, and it troubled him to part with them. When *Demas* was brought to the trial, and put to it, whether he would ſtick to the profeſſion of the Goſpel, or his worldly poſſeſſions, he quitted St. *Paul*, and declared for the world, 2 *Tim.* iv. 10. *Demas hath forſaken me, having loved this preſent world.* So far had his covetous humour beſotted him, as to make him prefer his preſent intereſt in theſe temporal things, before thoſe eternal rewards which the Goſpel offered.

III. There are likewiſe many temptations which men are expoſed to in the *enjoying* and *ſpending* of a great eſtate. It is hard to have a great eſtate, and not to be maſtered by the love of it; not to have our cares and thoughts, our hearts and affections ſwallowed up by it. 'Tis no eaſy thing for a man that hath riches, not to overvalue them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puffed up by them, and ſo place his truſt and confidence in them, *Prov.* xviii. 11. *The rich man's wealth is his ſtrong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.* The covetous man ſetteth up his riches in the place of God, and is apt *to fall down before his golden calf, and worſhip it: To ſay to the gold, thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, thou art my confidence: To rejoice, becauſe his wealth is great, and becauſe his hand hath gotten much.*

Riches are a great temptation to irreligion and atheiſm. Upon this account *Agur* wiſely prays to God for a moderate eſtate, becauſe of the danger of both the extremes of riches and poverty; becauſe of the great and violent temptations which men are expoſed to in both theſe conditions, *Prov.* xxx. 8, 9. *Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me.* Why not riches? *Leſt I be full and deny thee, and ſay, who is the Lord?* And much more do riches tempt men to pride and inſolence towards others, *Prov.* xviii. 23. *The poor uſeth intreaties, but the rich anſwereth roughly.* Mens ſpirits are commonly blown up and bloated with their fortunes, and their pride, and ſtomach, and paſſion, do uſually increaſe in proportion to their wealth.

And many times riches tempt men to luxury and intemperance, and all manner of exceſs. Rich men have a mighty temptation to allow themſelves all manner of unlawful pleaſures; becauſe he who hath a great eſtate, is furniſhed with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconſiſtent with a covetous humour; for there are, many times, men who are covetous in getting, for no other end and reaſon, but that they may *ſpend it upon their luſts.* As covetouſneſs ſometimes ſtarves other vices, ſo ſometimes it ſerves them, and is made ſubordinate to a man's ambition, or luſt, or ſome other reigning vice. There is no ſuch abſolute inconſiſtency between riches and virtue, but that it is poſſible that a man that is very rich may be very good. But yet if we conſult experience, I doubt it will be found a true obſervation, that there are but very few rich men, who are not inſupportable, either for their *vanity*, or their *vices*; ſo that our Saviour had reaſon for that ſevere queſtion, *How hard is it for a rich man to enter* *into the kingdom of God?* And well might he upon this account pronounce the *poor (the poor in eſtate, as well as the poor in ſpirit) bleſſed*, as we find he does, *Luke* vi. 20. *Bleſſed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* They oftner enter there than the rich.

Thirdly, Covetouſneſs is likewiſe evil and unreaſonable, becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable deſire. A covetous mind may propoſe to itſelf ſome certain bounds and limits, and a man may think that when he is arrived to ſuch an eſtate, and hath raiſed his fortune to ſuch a pitch, that he will then ſit down, contented and ſatisfied, and will ſeek after no more. But he deceives himſelf in this matter; for when he hath attained to that which he propoſed to himſelf, he will be never the nearer being ſatisfied. So *Solomon* tells us, *Eccleſ.* v. 10. *He that loveth ſilver, ſhall not be ſatisfied with ſilver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increaſe*; for no degree of wealth can ſatisfy a covetous mind. He may think ſo beforehand, that if he had ſo much it would be enough; but when he hath attained it, he will be ſtill reaching after more; for *covetouſneſs* is a diſeaſe of the mind, and an unnatural thirſt, which is inflamed by that which ſhould quench it. Every deſire that is natural, is ſatisfied and at reſt, when it hath once obtained the thing it deſired. If a man be hungry, he is ſatisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirſty, his thirſt is allayed and quenched when he hath drank to ſuch a proportion as nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this meaſure, nature is oppreſt, and it is a burden to him. But *covetouſneſs* is not the thirſt of nature, but of a diſeaſed mind. It is the thirſt of a fever, or of a dropſy; the more a man drinks, the more he deſires, and the more he is inflamed. In like manner, the more the covetous man increaſeth his eſtate, the more his deſires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new occaſions and new neceſſities; and every day as he grows richer, he diſcovers new wants; and a new poverty to be provided againſt, which he did not think of before, comes into his mind: *Et minùs hæc optat, qui non habet; and he that is without theſe things, covets them leſs than he that hath them.* So far is a covetous man's attaining to riches from giving him ſatisfaction, that he who hath ſcarce any thing at all, is many times much nearer to contentment, than he that hath got ſo much; nay ſo unreaſonable is this appetite, as to deſire more, even when the man knows not how to beſtow what he hath already. This *Solomon* obſerved long ſince (for the vices and humours of men are much the ſame in all ages) *Eccleſ.* iv. 8. *There is one alone, and there is not a ſecond; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labours, neither is his eye ſatisfied with riches, neither ſaith he, for whom do I labour, and bereave my ſoul of good? This is alſo vanity, yea, it is a ſore travel.* And indeed what can be greater vanity and folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a man's life, and yet to be uncertain all the while, for whom it is that he drudgeth, and taketh all theſe pains.

And if this be the nature of this vice, the more it gets, ſtill to covet the more; then nothing can be more unreaſonable, than to think to gratify this appetite; becauſe at this rate, the man can never be contented, becauſe he can never have enough; nay, ſo far is it from that, that every new acceſſion to his fortune, ſets his deſires one degree farther from reſt and ſatisfaction: For a covetous mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the man's deſire will increaſe much faſter than his eſtate; and then the richer he is, ſtill the poorer, becauſe he is ſtill the leſs contented with his condition. However, it is impoſſible that the man's deſire ſhould ever be ſatisfied; for deſire being always firſt, if the man's deſire of riches advanceth and goes forward as faſt as riches follow, then it is not poſſible for riches ever to overtake the deſire of them, no more than the hinder wheels of a coach can overtake thoſe which are before: becauſe as they were at a diſtance at firſt ſetting out, ſo let them go never ſo far, or ſo faſt, they keep the ſame diſtance ſtill.

So that it is the vaineſt thing in the world, for a man to deſign his own ſatisfaction by the perpetual increaſe of his fortune, becauſe contentment doth not ariſe from *the abundance of what a man hath*, but it muſt ſpring from the inward frame and temper of our minds; and the true way to it, is not to enlarge our eſtate, but to contract our deſires; and then it is poſſible that a man's money and his mind may meet; otherwiſe the purſuit is endleſs, and the farther a man follows contentment, it will but flee ſo much the farther from him; and when he hath attained the eſtate of a prince, and a revenue as great as that of *France*, or the *Turkiſh* empire, he ſhall be farther from being ſatisfied, than when he began the world, and had no more beforehand than would juſt pay for his next meal.

I ſhould now have proceeded to the *fourth* thing, whereby the unreaſonableneſs of *covetouſneſs* doth appear; becauſe the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in riches. And this is the argument which I ſhall more eſpecially inſiſt upon, becauſe it is that which our Saviour uſeth here in the *text*, to take men off from this vice. *The life of man conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* And this certainly is one of the beſt and moſt reaſonable conſiderations in the world, to moderate mens affections towards theſe things. Every reaſonable deſire propounds ſome end to itſelf. Now to what purpoſe ſhould any man deſire to increaſe his wealth ſo vaſtly beyond the proportion of his neceſſities, and real occaſions? What benefit and advantage would it be to any man, to have a hundred times more than he knows what to do withal? But I ſhall not enlarge upon this argument at preſent, but refer it to another opportunity.

SERMON XXXVIII.

The Third Sermon on this text.

The evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

AFTER I had, in my firſt diſcourſe upon this ſubject, given you an account of the *nature* of the vice of *covetouſneſs*, I proceeded in the next place to repreſent the great evil and unreaſonableneſs of it.

Firſt, Becauſe it takes men off from religion, and the care of their ſouls.

Secondly, Becauſe it tempts men to many things which are inconſiſtent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

Thirdly, Becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable deſire. Thus far I have gone; I proceed to the

Fourth thing, whereby the unreaſonableneſs of *covetouſneſs* will yet farther appear: Namely, becauſe the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in riches, and abundance. And this I ſhall inſiſt upon ſomewhat the more largely, becauſe it is the argument which our Saviour makes uſe of here in the *text*, to take men off from this ſin. *The life of man conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth. Therefore take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* And this certainly is one of the beſt and moſt reaſonable conſiderations in the world, to moderate our affections towards theſe things. For every reaſonable deſire propounds ſome end to itſelf. Now to what purpoſe ſhould any man deſire to increaſe his wealth ſo vaſtly, and beyond the proportion of his neceſſities and real occaſions? What benefit and advantage can it be to any man, to have an hundred, or perhaps a thouſand times more than he knows what to do withal?

And as for the other world, no man ever pretended that the heaping up riches here, would be uſeful to him there; *riches will not deliver him in the day of wrath.* No man was ever ſo ſenſeleſs, as to imagine that he could take his eſtate along with him into the other world; or if he could, that heaven was to be bought with money; or that a great eſtate, or a great many lordſhips would recommend him to the favour of God. 'Tis true indeed, a man may ſo uſe riches in this world, as thereby to promote and further his happineſs in the next. But then it is likewiſe as true, that a man may ſo demean himſelf in a poor and low condition, as thereby to render himſelf as acceptable to God, and capable of as great a reward, as the richeſt man can do. The poor woman's *two mites*, chearfully given to pious and charitable uſes, will go as far in the other world, and find as great a reward there, as the rich man's *thouſands of gold and ſilver.* And a man may be as truly generous and charitable out of a little, as out of the greateſt fortune.

Beſides that the poor man's contentedneſs in a mean condition, is more admirable in itſelf, and more valuable with God, than for a rich man to be ſo.

So that the great uſe of riches reſpects this world, and the beſt uſe of them is in ways of charity; and the poor man's charity, though it cannot be of ſo great an extent in the effects of it, yet in the degree of its virtue and merit it may be equal to it.

Now the *two* great deſigns of men, in regard to this world, are theſe.

1. To maintain and ſupport our lives as long as we can.
2. To make our lives as truly happy and comfortable as we can.

To the *firſt* of theſe ends, namely, the ſupport of our lives, a very little will ſuffice; and 'tis not much that is neceſſary to the *other*, to render our lives as truly comfortable as this world can make them; ſo that a vaſt eſtate is not neceſſary to either of theſe ends; for a man may *live* by having what is neceſſary, and may *live comfortably* by having that which is convenient.

No man lives the longer by having abundance; it is many times an occaſion of ſhortning a man's life, by miniſtring to exceſs and intemperance; but ſeldom of prolonging it. And ſetting aſide the vain fancy and conceit of men, no man lives the more happily, for having more than he hath real uſe and occaſion for.

Theſe *two* heads I ſhall at preſent ſpeak to, to make out the full force of this reaſon, which our Saviour here uſeth; namely, *that a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

I. That riches do not contribute to the ſupport of our lives; nor,

II. To the happineſs and comfort of them. That is, they are not neceſſary to either of theſe ends. For by *riches* I mean, *whatever is beyond a ſufficient competency of thoſe things which are requiſite to the real uſes and occaſions of human life.*

Firſt, Riches and abundance do not contribute to the ſupport of our lives. And this our Saviour very well repreſents to us, in the parable immediately after the *text*, of *the rich man*, who was continually increaſing his eſtate, ſo that *he had goods laid up for many years*; but he lived not one jot the longer for being provided of the conveniences of life for ſo long a time beforehand; for whilſt he was bleſſing himſelf, as if he had ſecured his happineſs ſufficiently for this world, he was uncertain of his continuance in it; God having decreed to take him out of this world, at that very time when he had determined to enter upon the enjoyment of thoſe things, which he had been ſo long laying up. God ſays to him, *thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee, and then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be, which thou haſt provided?* that is, what good then will all theſe things do thee, when thou haſt no further uſe of, and occaſion for them? So that if he had been the pooreſt man in the world, and had not been provided for the next meal, he might have lived as long as he did with all his ſtores. You ſee then that in this ſenſe, *a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* For notwithſtanding all his great barns, and the abundance of fruits he had ſtowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer, than the pooreſt man might have done.

Secondly, Nor do riches contribute to the happineſs and comfort of our lives. Happineſs is not to be bought and purchaſed together with great lordſhips; it depends upon a great many cauſes, among which a competency of the things of this world is one; but riches and abundance is none of them. The happineſs of this world conſiſts in theſe *two* things.

1. In the enjoyment of good. And,
2. In a ſtate of freedom from evil.

Now riches do not neceſſarily make a man happy in either of theſe reſpects.

Firſt, For the enjoyment of good, a competent eſtate ſuitable to the condition and ſtation in which God hath ſet us in this world, will give a man whatever nature and reaſon can deſire; and abundance cannot make a man happier. If a man had an hundred times more than he needed, he could but enjoy it according to the capacity of a man; for if he conſulted his own happineſs, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he muſt eat and drink within the bounds of temperance and health, and muſt wear no more cloaths than are for his convenience. 'Tis true, he hath wherewithal to put on a new ſuit every day; which is to be uneaſy all the days of his life: and may drink, if he pleaſes, every time out of a new cup; which would be a vain expence, and a great trouble to his ſervants, without any manner of convenience to himſelf.

But then if riches fall into the *covetous* man's hands, they can be no happineſs to him, becauſe he hath no heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the eſtate of a rich man, but he wants the comfort of it, becauſe he hath the mind of a poor man; and enjoyment is all the felicity that is in a great fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up, is from that time not ours, but ſomebody's elſe. He that heaps up riches, and enjoys them not, is rich only for his heir, but a beggar for himſelf.

We are apt to pity poor men, and too apt to deſpiſe them; but ſurely no man's condition is more to be deplored than his, who ſtarves himſelf in the midſt of plenty, and being ſurrounded with the bleſſings of God, turns them into the greateſt curſe; for it is a much greater curſe, not to uſe an eſtate when one has it, than not to have it. It is like a plentiful table without an appetite.

But it may be it is a great happineſs to have a great eſtate, though a man never uſe it; the pleaſure of ſeeing it, and telling it over, may be like the removing of billets; which may warm a man as much as if he had ſpent and conſumed them. But *this is real*, and the other only *imaginary*. I doubt not, many covetous men take a great deal of pleaſure in ruminating upon their wealth, and in re-counting what they have; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it, and if they had not, it is very hard to underſtand where the reaſonable pleaſure and happineſs lies of having things to no end. It is at the beſt, like that of ſome fooliſh birds, which, they ſay, take pleaſure in ſtealing money, that they may hide it; as if it were worth the while for men to take pains to dig ſilver out of the earth, for no other purpoſe, but to melt it down and ſtamp it, and bury it there again.

But many neceſſities may happen, which we cannot foreſee, and it is good to provide againſt them. There is nothing ſo bad, but ſomething may be ſaid in excuſe of it; and I do not deny, but that a provident care againſt the common accidents of human life is very commendable; but it is unreaſonable to think of providing againſt all poſſibilities, which it is impoſſible either to foreſee or prevent. 'Tis very poſſible, that after a man hath gotten the greateſt eſtate imaginable, he may loſe it all by ſome fatal accident; and then to what purpoſe was all this proviſion made, when that which was ſo long a time a getting and laying up, is loſt at once?

Beſides, that it is not eaſy to conceive what neceſſity can happen to a *covetous* man, to give him an occaſion of uſing his eſtate; he cannot find in his heart to beſtow it upon himſelf in ſuch things as are convenient, nay, almoſt neceſſary for the ſupport of his life; for no man can feed his ſervants more penuriouſly than he does himſelf; all the religion he values himſelf upon, is a ſtrict obſervance of the *Leſſian* diet which he recommends to thoſe few that can deny themſelves to dine with him, in hopes to make better meals upon his eſtate when he is gone. And if he be ſo penurious to himſelf the neceſſities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one occaſion that could tempt ſuch a man to lay out what he hath; namely when one part of his eſtate is in danger, to ſpend the other to ſecure it. And yet even in that caſe, if his cauſe were not very clear and good, he would go nigh to loſe it, uſing it as he does himſelf; that is, by ſtarving it. And if this be all, then a man had as good be without an eſtate, and ſave himſelf the trouble either of getting it, or ſecuring it; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the care and pains.

Secondly, The happineſs of this world conſiſts in a ſtate of freedom from evil. Now the great evils that men are liable to in this world, are ſuch as are incident to them, either in the courſe of their lives, or at the time of their death; and riches do not contribute to mens happineſs, by freeing them from either of theſe. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeverally.

I. Not from the evils which are incident to men in the courſe of their lives. Theſe are of *two* kinds, *inward*, or *outward*.

1. *Inward* evils, by which I mean thoſe of the mind; and our greateſt troubles are from within, from the anxiety of our minds, and the guilt of our conſciences, from the vicious inclinations of our wills, and the irregularity and diſorders of our paſſions. Now riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our coveting, if they would help to cure theſe diſtempers of our minds; but they are the leaſt fitted for ſuch a purpoſe of any thing in the world; for not he that hath the greateſt eſtate, but he that hath the feweſt and moſt reaſonable deſires, and the beſt governed paſſions and the moſt virtuous inclinations, is the happieſt man, and dwells neareſt to ſatisfaction. *Nemo malus felix, no bad man can be happy*, though he were poſſeſſed of the whole world; becauſe he hath that within him, which frets and diſcontents him, which galls his ſpirit and keeps his mind reſtleſs and uneaſy; and he that does not enjoy *himſelf*, can enjoy nothing elſe.

Did but men know how much happineſs hath been enjoyed by many a pious and virtuous man in a mean fortune, how quiet and eaſy their minds have been, how much fuller of joy and pleaſure, than the heart of any *covetous* worldling ever was in his moſt proſperous eſtate, and when *his corn, and wine, and oil abounded*; did we (I ſay) but know this, we ſhould not envy the men of mighty fortunes. *Nam neque divitibus contingunt gaudia ſolis. Rich men are not the only happy people in the world.* If they be not *good as* well as *rich*, happineſs is a greater ſtranger to their dwellings, than to the cottages of poorer men.

Now riches are ſo far from helping to make men good, that they are one of the greateſt temptations to them in the world to be otherwiſe; which is the reaſon why our Saviour ſays, *it is ſo very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*; becauſe conſidering the powerful, and almoſt irreſiſtible temptations of a great eſtate, and the impotency and weakneſs of human nature to govern itſelf in a plentiful fortune, it is very hard for a rich man to be ſo good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmneſs of reſolution, a very ſolid and vigorous conſtitution of mind, to bear a great fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a man hath never more reaſon to implore God's gracious help and aſſiſtance, and to conſult his own beſt and cooleſt thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himſelf, than when the outward bleſſings of this life flow in amain upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur, nothing ſooner debaucheth men than proſperity*; and he is a very happy man, whom wealth and a good fortune do not make licentious and diſſolute; becauſe theſe tempt men with the power and opportunity to do all the the ill that their wicked hearts can deſign, or deſire.

The temptation of riches, and the power that goes along with them, is ſo forcible and prevalent, that the devil, who is a ſagacious ſpirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the experiment, whether Chriſt was a mere man, or the Son of God, reſerved this for his laſt temptation, reſolving, if that would not do, to try him no farther. After he had aſſaulted him in ſeveral kinds, he repreſents to him at laſt that which was ſufficient to have ſurfeited two of the moſt inſatiable deſires of human nature, *ambition* and *covetouſneſs*, even *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them in a moment*, or *point of time*; he brings all the rays of this glory to one point, that the temptation might kindle and take hold the ſooner; and ſays to him, *all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me*. He ſuppoſed with great probability, that if he were but a mere man, the ſtrongeſt and moſt reſolved mind would bend and yield to ſo dazzling a temptation as this; but when he ſaw that this temptation was rejected, he found himſelf baffled, and gave him over; ſince this did not move him, he concluded now, that he was *the Son of God indeed*, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther.

From all this it appears, that riches are ſo far from making men virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to virtue, than a full condition; if men have not a great degree of grace, as well as diſcretion, to manage it. *Solomon* tells us, that the *proſperity of fools deſtroyeth them*.

And yet how do moſt of us court this temptation, and are forward to thruſt and venture ourſelves upon it? there are a great many other things, in which moſt men make a right judgment of themſelves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every man will not take upon him to be a phyſician, or a lawyer, to preſcribe medicines in dangerous caſes, and to give counſel to men in knotty and difficult points about their eſtates; but every man thinks himſelf fit enough to be rich, and ſufficiently qualified to manage a great eſtate, if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few things in the world, which men are more inſufficient for, than to wield and govern a great fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger of miſcarriage. It is not every body's talent to be wealthy and wiſe, rich and innocent.

2. As for the *outward* evils of this life, ſuch as want and contempt, bodily pains and diſeaſes, unhappineſs in friends and relations, a great eſtate is by no means a ſufficient ſecurity or remedy to a *covetous* man againſt theſe.

(1.) As for want. And ſurely one would think, that if riches were good for any thing, they are a very proper remedy againſt this evil, and a moſt certain and infallible cure of it; but experience tells us quite otherwiſe. *Socrates* was wont to ſay, that, "To "want nothing, is the privilege of the deity, and proper to God alone; but to ſtand "in need of as few things as may be, is the privilege of a wiſe and good man, and a "ſtate of happineſs next to that of God himſelf; becauſe he that hath the feweſt wants

“ is the moſt eaſily ſupplied, and is next to him that is ſelf-ſufficient.” Now a man of moderate deſires hath infinitely fewer wants than a *covetous* man; and becauſe his deſires are moderate, a moderate eſtate will ſatisfy them: But the wants of a *covetous* mind are never to be ſupplied, becauſe it hath ordered the matter ſo cunningly, as to want even that which it hath; ſuch a man does not get riches to ſupply his wants; but is content to want that he may be rich; inſomuch that he hath not the heart to uſe his eſtate for the ſupply of his real neceſſities. How many do almoſt ſtarve themſelves in the midſt of plenty and abundance? There is no greater ſign of poverty, than to be deeply in debt; now the *covetous* man lives and dies in debt to himſelf. Some men have been ſo ſhamefully penurious and ſtingy to themſelves, as even *to die to ſave charges*, which yet perhaps is the moſt generous thing they ever did in their whole lives, in reſpect to the world; becauſe by this means ſomebody may come to the enjoyment of their eſtates; and that great dunghill which they have been ſo long in raking together, may by this means come to be ſpread abroad for the publick benefit.

So that if a *covetous* man were poſſeſſed of the wealth of both the *Indies*, all this would not free him from want. A poor man's wants may be ſatisfied, when he hath obtained what he wants: but the *covetous* man labours of an incurable want; becauſe he wants that which he hath, as well as that which he hath not.

(2.) As for contempt, riches will not ſecure a *covetous* man againſt this neither; nay, ſo far is it from that, that he is commonly more ridiculous and deſpiſed for living poor in the midſt of abundance, than if he were really ſo. Did I ſay *really* ſo? He is the moſt *really poor* of all other men. For as one ſays well, *The rich poor man is emphatically poor.*

(3.) Neither will riches free men from bodily illneſs and pain. The rich are liable to as many diſeaſes, and as ſharp pains, as the poor, and they have commonly leſs patience to bear them than the poor; becauſe they have not been inured to other ſorts of evils. They that have been accuſtomed to labour, are generally beſt fitted to bear pain; the rich are commonly more tender and delicate, and have a quicker ſenſe of pain, more matter, and greater quantity of humours to feed a diſeaſe, and to inflame it to a greater height.

I muſt not here forget that there is a ſort of rich men, I mean the penurious miſers, who ſtarve themſelves more than the poor, and fare many times more hardly; and for this reaſon, though they be not in danger of the diſeaſes that come from intemperance, and a plentiful table; yet they are liable to the diſeaſes which proceed from ſtarving and emptineſs; which the phyſicians ſay are more dangerous than the other: So that neither the prodigal nor the niggardly rich man is ſecured from bodily pains and diſeaſes, by a great eſtate.

(4.) Neither will riches ſecure a man from being unhappy in his friends and relations. A great eſtate will not make a man's children either more dutiful or wiſe, than the children of meaner perſons; and if they be not ſo, his eſtate cannot be ſo great an happineſs to him, as *they* may prove an affliction. *Solomon* tells us, that the very fear and apprehenſion of this did very much imbitter the fruit of all his labour; and he ſeems to ſpeak it ſenſibly, and very probably with a melancholy reflexion upon his ſon *Rehoboam*, Eccleſ. ii. 18, 19. *Yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the ſun, becauſe I ſhould leave it unto the man that ſhall be after me; and who knows whether he ſhall be a wiſe man or a fool? Yet ſhall he have rule over all my labour, wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have ſhewed myſelf wiſe under the ſun.* Who knows whether he ſhall be a wiſe man, or a fool? he ſeems to ſpeak doubtfully: but he had a very ſhrewd gueſs what kind of man his ſon would make; for he ſpeaks more deſpondingly in the next words, ver. 20, 21. *therefore I went about to cauſe my heart to deſpair of all the labour which I took under the ſun*, that is, when I thought ſeriouſly of it, I began to think that all the pains I had taken to get an eſtate, would be but to little purpoſe; *for there is a man* (ſaith he) *whoſe labour is in wiſdom, and in knowledge, and in equity* (that is, who by wiſe and honeſt means hath raiſed a great eſtate) *yet to a man that hath not laboured therein* (that is, to a man who is endowed with none of theſe qualities) *ſhall he leave it for his portion*; *this alſo is vanity, and a great evil.*

And as for friends, though the rich man have many that will call themſelves ſo, yet he had almoſt as good have none; for he can hardly ever know whether they be ſo or not, unleſs he chance to fall into poverty, and then indeed the change of his condition may give him that advantage and opportunity, which otherwiſe he is never like to have, of diſcerning between his friends and his flatterers. Thus you ſee that riches are no ſecurity againſt the moſt conſiderable evils which attend us in the courſe of our lives.

II. When we come to die, nothing will miniſter leſs comfort to us, at that time, than a great eſtate. It is then a very ſmall pleaſure to a man, to reflect how much he hath gotten in the world, when he ſees that he muſt leave it; nay, like the young man in the Goſpel, *he goes away* ſo much the more *ſorrowful, becauſe he hath great poſſeſſions.* All the things of this world ſeem very inconſiderable to a man, when he approaches to the confines of the other: for when he ſees that he muſt leave this world, then he would fain make a virtue of neceſſity, and begins to change his apprehenſions of theſe things, and to have very ſlight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinced he can enjoy them no longer. What the philoſopher was wont to ſay of the pleaſures of this world, is as true of riches, and all the other enjoyments of it; That, “ if they did but put on the ſame countenance, and look with the ſame face, when they come to us, that they will do when they turn from us, and take their leave of us, we ſhould hardly entertain them.”

Now if a man have placed his chief happineſs in this world, as the *covetous* man does in his riches, his great trouble when he comes to die, will be, that he muſt leave them. Nothing could be more ſeverely ſaid to the *covetous* man, than that which God ſays to the *rich man* in the parable; *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee, and then whoſe ſhall theſe things be?* For of all things in the world, ſuch men cannot endure to think of parting with theſe things, or that what they have got with ſuch great care and labour, ſhould come to the poſſeſſion of another.

And therefore when we are ſo hot and eager in the purſuit of theſe things, we ſhould do well to conſider, *how they will appear to us in a dying hour.* And this conſideration well imprinted upon our minds, would make us very careful, to treaſure up other kind of comforts to ourſelves againſt ſuch a time, and to labour after thoſe things which we ſhall never grow out of conceit withal, but ſhall value them to the laſt, and then moſt of all when we come to die, and leave this world. For as a Poet of our own ſays excellently,

'Tis not that which firſt we love:
But what dying we approve.

Thus I have done with the *fourth* thing, whereby the evil and unreaſonableneſs of *covetouſneſs* doth appear; namely, that the happineſs of human life doth not conſiſt in a great eſtate; *the life of man doth not conſiſt in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* The great ends of *religion*, and *covetouſneſs*, are very different. The great end which *religion* propoſeth to itſelf, is *happineſs:* but the great end which *covetouſneſs* propoſeth, is *riches*; which are neither a neceſſary nor a probable means of *happineſs*. I ſhould now have proceeded to the *fifth* and *laſt* particular; namely, that riches are ſo far from being the happineſs of human life, that they uſually contribute very much to our miſery and ſorrow; as will appear, if we conſider theſe *four* things.

Firſt, The labour and care which *covetous* men are at in the getting of a great eſtate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of loſing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of loſing it; and,

Fourthly, The dreadful and heavy account which every man muſt give of a great eſtate. But theſe particulars, together with the *application* of this whole diſcourſe, I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON XXXIX.

The fourth Sermon on this Text.

The Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

IN my two laſt diſcourſes on this ſubject, I have repreſented the evil and unreaſonableneſs of the vice of *covetouſneſs* in *four* particulars. I proceed now to the *fifth* and laſt particular, whereby I told you the evil and unreaſonableneſs of it would appear, *viz.*

That riches are ſo far from being the happineſs of human life, that they uſually contribute very much to our miſery and ſorrow; as will evidently appear, if we conſider theſe *four* things:

Firſt, The labour and care which the covetous man is at in getting of a great eſtate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of loſing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of having loſt it.

Fourthly, The heavy and dreadful account which every man muſt give of a great eſtate.

Firſt, The labour and care which the *covetous* man hath in getting a great eſtate. He, that will be rich, muſt ſweat for it, and refuſe no pains and trouble; he muſt *riſe up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulneſs.* A ſlave that digs in the mines, or rowes in the gallies, is not a greater drudge, than ſome *covetous* worldlings are; only with this difference, that the *covetous* man thinks that he labours and takes all theſe pains for himſelf; whereas the ſlave underſtands the matter more truly, and thinks that he does it for another.

But beſides the pains he takes, he is full of care and anxiety. How is he, through the greedy deſire of *having*, racked between the hopes of getting, and the fear of miſſing what he ſeeks? The Apoſtle obſerves what tormenting cares accompany this vice: 1 *Tim.* vi. 10. *The love of money* (ſaith he) *is the root of all evil*; not only of the evil of ſin, but of the evil likewiſe of trouble and diſquiet. For it follows, *which while ſome coveted after, they have pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows*: variety of troubles attend them that *will be rich*.

Secondly, If we conſider the anxiety of keeping what they have got, together with the fear of loſing it again, this is another great part of a *covetous* man's infelicity. The rich man here in the parable after the *text*, when he ſaw his eſtate coming upon him ſo faſt, cries out, *what ſhall I do?* Poor man! who would not pity his condition, to ſee him put to this difficulty and diſtreſs, and to hear him make as heavy a moan as the pooreſt man could do! Now that he hath a plentiful harveſt, and his crop hath anſwered, if it were poſſible, his *covetous* deſire, he is in a great deal of perplexity, and almoſt at his wits end how to diſpoſe of it; he was horribly afraid leſt any of it ſhould be loſt for want of a ſecure place to ſtore it up in; *What ſhall I do, becauſe I have no room, where to beſtow my fruits?* Where was the difficulty of this? Why, he was loth to loſe his fruits, and he was loth to lay out money to ſecure them. But upon farther conſideration, he reſolves *of the two evils to chooſe the leaſt*; and *he ſaid, this will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I beſtow all my fruits, and my goods.* But why could he not let the barns he had ſtand, and build more; No, that he did not think ſo well, he loved to ſee all his good things at one view, and what a goodly ſhow they would make together. Beſides that, it is the humour of *covetouſneſs*, when it breaks out into expence, to over-do; the *miſer's buildings* are like his *feaſts*, always extravagant. The *covetous* man (as to the buſineſs of expence) is like a coward as to fighting, he declines it as long as he can; but when he is puſhed to the laſt neceſſity, he grows deſperate and lays about him.

> *Tantis parta malis, curâ majore metuque*
> *Servantur; miſera eſt magni cuſtodia cenſûs.*

Riches which are got with ſo much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A covetous man is in nothing more miſerable, than in the anxiety and care of diſpoſing and ſecuring what he hath got. When a man's deſires are endleſs, his cares and fears will be ſo too.

Thirdly, As great an evil as any of the former, is the vexation of having loſt theſe things. If by any accident the man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head and mourns, *as a man would do for his firſt-born*; and is ready to cry out with *Micah, they have taken away my Gods, and what have I more?* Upon every little loſs the *covetous* man is undone, though he have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the hearts of earthly-minded men many times pierced with earthly loſſes, as with *Rachel to refuſe to be comforted.* Nay, St. *Paul* obſerves, that *the ſorrow of the world* ſometimes *worketh death*, 2 *Cor.* vii. 10.

Fourthly, But the ſaddeſt conſideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful account that muſt one day be given, both of the getting and uſing of a great eſtate. They that have got an eſtate by fraud and falſhood, or by oppreſſion *and grinding the face of the poor*, may read their doom at large, *James*, v. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. *Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miſeries that ſhall come upon you; your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten; your gold and ſilver are cankered, and the ruſt of them ſhall be a witneſs againſt you, and ſhall eat your fleſh as it were fire: ye have heaped treaſure together for the laſt days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbaoth; ye have lived in pleaſure on the earth, and been wanton, ye have nouriſhed your hearts as in a day of ſlaughter.*

And we muſt be accountable likewiſe for the uſing of our eſtates. God gives them to us in truſt, and the greater they are, the more we are to account for; ſo much as we need is *ours*, but beyond what will ſupport us, and be a convenient proviſion for our families, in the rank God hath placed them; all that is given to us, that we may give it to *others*; and indeed it is not *ours*; we are the *proprietors* of it in reſpect of men, but in reſpect of God we are but *truſtees*, and *ſtewards*, and God will require an account of us how we have diſpoſed of it.

And can there be a more reigning madneſs among men, than to take care only to increaſe their account more and more, by receiving much; whereas our great care and concernment ſhould be to clear our account, by laying out what we receive, according to the truſt repoſed in us? How much we ſhall receive of the things of this world, is in the care and will of our maſter; but our care and fidelity are ſeen in laying it out as we ought. Among *men* (ſays one) it is well enough if a ſteward can give an account of ſo much laid out, and ſo much in caſh, and upon this he ſhall have his diſcharge: But we cannot this way clear our account with *God*; for it is not offering him *his own again* that will ſatisfy him, as we may learn from the parable of the *talents*. So that upon the whole matter, we ſhould be ſo far from envying the rich, that we ſhould rather envy the ſafety and happineſs of thoſe who are not intruſted with ſuch dangerous bleſſings, and who are free from the temptations of a plentiful fortune, and the curſe of a *covetous* mind, and from the heavy account of a great eſtate.

I come now, in the laſt place, to make ſome *application* of this diſcourſe to ourſelves.

I. Let our Saviour's *caution* take place with us, let theſe words of his ſink into our minds, *take heed and beware of covetouſneſs.* Our Saviour, I told you, doubles the *caution*, that we may double our *care.* It is a ſin very apt to ſteal upon us, and ſlily to inſinuate itſelf into us under the ſpecious pretence of induſtry in our callings, and a provident care of our families: But however it may be coloured over, it is a great evil, dangerous to ourſelves, and miſchievous to the world. Now to kill this vice in us, beſides the conſiderations before-mentioned taken from the *evil* and *unreaſonableneſs* of it, I will urge theſe *three* more:

1. That the things of this world are uncertain.

2. That our lives are as uncertain as theſe things: And,

3. That there is another life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the things of this world. This ſhould very much cool our affections toward them, that after all our care and diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not ſure to enjoy them; we may be deprived of them by a thouſand accidents. This conſideration *Solomon* urgeth, to take men off from an over-eager purſuit of theſe things, *Prov.* xxiii. 5. *Wilt thou ſet thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make to themſelves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven.* After we have ſat brooding over an eſtate many years, it may all on a ſudden, before we are aware, take wing, and *fly away, like an eagle towards heaven,* ſoaring ſuddenly out of our ſight, and never to return again.

And the ſame argument St. *Paul* uſeth, to take off mens affections from the world, 1 *Cor.* vii. 31. becauſe *the faſhion of this world paſſeth away*; παράγει τό σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου. He compares the things of this world to a *ſcene* which is preſently changed, and vaniſheth almoſt as ſoon as it appears. Now ſeeing theſe things are ſo uncertain, we ſhould take heed how we fix our hearts too much upon them; we ſhould not make love to any thing that is ſo fickle and inconſtant as this world is. We ſhould be afraid to contract too near and intimate a friendſhip with any thing which will forſake us, after we have courted it with ſo much importunity, and purchaſed it with ſo much pains, and endeavoured to ſecure it with ſo much caution and tenderneſs.

2. Our lives are as uncertain as theſe things. If our eſtates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one ſays) it is folly to build our hopes upon a match, where both parties are ſo uncertain and inconſtant. Why ſhould we place our deareſt affections upon things, which we are not ſure to enjoy one moment? *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be taken from thee, and then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be?* I remember *Seneca* tells us a real ſtory, juſt anſwerable to the *rich man* in the parable, of an acquaintance of his, who by long and great induſtry had arrived to a vaſt eſtate; and juſt when he began to enjoy it, after one of the firſt good meals which perhaps he ever made in his life, that very night *his ſoul was taken from him*, for preſently after ſupper he died. *In ipſo actu bene ſedentium rerum, in ipſo procurrentis fortunæ impetu. In the height of his proſperity, and in the full career of his good fortune.*

But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we ſhould remember that our life is but a paſſage through the world, and that we are but *pilgrims and ſtrangers in the world, as all our fathers were, that we have here no abiding-place, no continuing city*, but are travelling towards our own country. And why ſhould we load ourſelves whilſt we are upon our journey, and cumber ourſelves with thoſe things which will be of no uſe to us there, where we are going.

But the great wonder of all is, that this vice ſhould ſo ſtrongly reign, and even grow upon men in old age, and get ſtrength, as weakneſs creeps upon us. This very thought *that we are to die*, ſhould work in us a great indifferency towards the things of this world. But when men are convinced they cannot live long, and that every ſtep they take, they are in danger of ſtumbling into the grave, this one would think ſhould wean our affections from this world; and yet uſually none take ſo faſt hold of it, and embrace it ſo kindly, as old men; like friends, who though they know they muſt leave one another, yet are loth to part. Do we not ſee many purſue theſe things with as much eagerneſs and appetite, when they are leaving the world, as if they were to ſtay in it an hundred years longer? ſo that in this ſenſe alſo, they are *children again*, and are as fond of theſe toys, as if they were juſt beginning the world, and ſetting out for their whole life.

3. There is another life after this, to be ſeriouſly thought on, and provided for with great care; and did men firmly believe this, they would not with *Martha, buſy themſelves about many things, but would mind the one thing neceſſary*, and with *Mary chooſe that better part, which could not be taken from them.* They would overlook the trifles of this world, and ſcarce take notice of *the things which are ſeen*, but be only intent upon *the things which are not ſeen; becauſe the things which are ſeen are but temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.* The great concernments of another world would employ their utmoſt care and their beſt thoughts.

Whilſt we are in this world, we ſhould remember that *this is not our home, nor the place of our reſt*; and therefore as men do in an *inn*, we ſhould make a ſhift with thoſe indifferent accommodations which the world will afford us, and which we can have upon eaſy terms, without too much trouble and ſtir, becauſe we are not to continue long here; and in the mean time we ſhould cheer up ourſelves with the thoughts of the pleaſure and the plenty of *our father's houſe*, and of that full contentment and ſatisfaction which we ſhall meet withal, when we come to thoſe *everlaſting habitations.*

So that our great care ſhould be to provide for eternity. If we have unbounded deſires, let us place them upon ſuch objects as are worthy of them. Let us *earneſtly covet the beſt things*, and ſeek after *the true riches*. We ſhould ſo mind the world, as to make heaven our great care; as to make ſure to *provide ourſelves bags that wax not old; a treaſure in the heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth*, as our Saviour adviſeth, *Luke* xii. 33. To the ſame purpoſe is the council of St. *Paul*, 1 *Tim*. vi. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be rich in good works, willing to diſtribute, ready to communicate, laying up for themſelves a good foundation* (or, as the word θεμέλιον may alſo be rendred, *a good treaſure) againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.*

I have told you that all theſe things will fail in a ſhort ſpace; we ſhall either be ſtripp'd of them, or ſeparated from them when we come to die, and ſhall look over to that vaſt eternity which we muſt ſhortly enter upon; this world, and all the enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we ſhall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another world, and be heartily ſorry that the things of this world have taken up ſo much of our time and care, and that the great and weighty concernments of all eternity have been ſo little minded and regarded by us. Now ſeeing all theſe things ſhall be, pardon me, if I earneſtly beg of you in the midſt of all your worldly cares, to have ſome conſideration for your immortal ſouls, which are in no wiſe provided for by a great eſtate, but are deſigned for nobler enjoyments than this world can afford. When you are taking care to feed and clothe theſe dying bodies, remember that better part of yourſelves which is to live for ever. Let not all your enquiry be, *what ſhall I eat? or what ſhall I drink? or wherewithal ſhall I be clothed?* But ſometimes aſk yourſelves this queſtion, *what ſhall I do to be ſaved?* I have an immortal ſpirit, it is but fit ſome care ſhould be taken of that, to train it up to eternity, and to make it *fit to be made partaker of an inheritance among them that are ſanctified.*

The firm belief and ſerious conſideration of the great things of another world cannot ſurely but cool the heat of our affections towards theſe dying and periſhing things, and make us reſolved not to do any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our conſciences, or forfeit our intereſt and happineſs in another world.

II. By way of remedy againſt this vice of *covetouſneſs*, it is good for men to be contented with their condition. This the Apoſtle preſcribes as the beſt cure of this vice, *Heb*. xiii. 5. *Let your converſation be without covetouſneſs, and be content with ſuch things as ye have*; ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν, being contented with the preſent, and thinking that ſufficient. A *covetous* man cannot enjoy the preſent, for fear of the future; either out of fear that he ſhall come to want, or out of a ſickneſs and uneaſineſs of mind, which makes that nothing pleaſeth him: but if we could bring our minds to our condition, and be contented with what we have, we ſhould not be ſo eager and impatient after more.

This contentedneſs with our preſent condition doth not hinder, but that men by providence, and induſtry, and lawful endeavours, may lay the foundation of a more plentiful fortune than they have at preſent. For provided a man uſe no indirect and diſhoneſt ways to increaſe his eſtate, and do not torment himſelf with anxious cares, do neither make himſelf guilty, nor miſerable, that he may be rich; provided he do not neglect better things, to attain theſe, and have not an inſatiable appetite towards them; provided he do not idolize his eſtate, and ſet his heart upon theſe things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himſelf, and to be charitable to others; nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his preſent condition, and yet take all fair opportunities which the providence of God puts into his hands of enlarging his fortune. It is a good character which the poet gives of *Ariſtippus*,

> *Omnis Ariſtippum decuit color, & ſtatus, & res;*
> *Tentantem majora, ferè præſentibus æquum.*

" Every ſtate and condition became him; for though he endeavoured after more, yet
" his mind was always in a manner equal to his preſent condition.

But if a man be diſcontented with the preſent, and reſtleſs becauſe he hath no more, the whole world will not ſatisfy him; and if God ſhould raiſe him from one ſtep to another, he would never think his fortune high enough, and in every degree of it would be as little contented as he was at firſt. Our Saviour repreſents this ſort of men by the *rich man* here in the parable, who when his barns were full, and ready to crack, his mind was not filled; therefore he pulls them down and builds greater; and if he had lived till theſe had been full, they muſt have gone down too, and he would ſtill have built greater. So that though he deſigned when he had raiſed his eſtate to ſuch a pitch, to have ſet down, and taken his eaſe, yet his *covetous* humour would have been ſtirring again, and ſtill have ſtept in between him and contentment and for ever have hindred him from arriving at it.

III. By way of direction, I would perſuade thoſe who are rich, to be charitable with what they have. If God hath bleſt us with abundance, and we would not be like this *rich man* here in the parable, we muſt lay out of our eſtates, in ways of piety and charity, for the publick good, and for the private relief of thoſe who are in want; for that is the ἀπόδοσις, or moral of the parable; *ſo is he that layeth up treaſures for himſelf, and is not rich towards God.* So ſhall he be; ſuch an iſſue of his folly may every one expect (to be taken away from his eſtate before he comes to enjoy it) *who layeth up treaſures for himſelf, but is not rich towards God*; but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? By works of mercy, and charity. This our Saviour calls *laying up for ourſelves treaſure in heaven*; *Matth.* vi. 20. And at the 33d verſe of this chapter, he calls giving of alms, *providing for ourſelves bags which wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens which faileth not:* they who do thus, who *are rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate,* are ſaid to *lay up for themſelves a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life,* 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. *Extra fortunam eſt quicquid donatur*; "whatſoever we give to the "poor is ſafely diſpoſed, and put out of the reach of fortune, becauſe it is laid up in "heaven, where we may expect the return and recompence of it." Charity to our poor brethren is a certain way of tranſmitting our riches into the other world to make way for our reception there. So our Lord tells us, *Luke* xvi. 9, *I ſay unto you, make to yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye ſhall fail* (that is, when you ſhall leave this world, and the enjoyments of it) *they may receive you into everlaſting habitations.*

At the great day of judgment, when we ſhall all appear before God, and according to our Saviour's repreſentation of the proceedings of that day, ſhall hear him thus expoſtulating with men, *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat*; *thirſty, and ye gave me no drink*; *naked, and ye clothed me not*; *ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not*; what would we then give, how much of our eſtates, if we had them then at our command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that comfortable ſentence paſt upon us: *Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world!* But if we be found among thoſe who would ſpare nothing out of their abundance to any charitable uſe and purpoſe. I have not the heart to tell you how miſerable the condition of ſuch perſons will be, and how dreadful a doom will be paſſed upon them.

It is a ſad conſideration, that there are ſome perſons in the world, who ſeem to be only defective in this duty; like the young man in the Goſpel, who lacked but this *one thing* to make him perfect; *he had kept the commandments from his youth*, and preſerved himſelf from thoſe groſs ſins which the law did plainly forbid; and yet for want of *this one thing* he parted from his Saviour, and, for any thing we know, fell ſhort of eternal life. There are many who are very devout and religious, much in prayer and faſting, and all the other frugal exerciſes of piety, which coſt them no money; but yet are very defective in alms and charity, which in ſcripture are ſo frequently joined with the faſtings and prayers of good men; and by this means, all their devotion and diligence in the other parts of religion is loſt, and will not bring them to heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who *are not far from the kingdom of God, ſhould fall ſhort of it?* that they who in moſt other things bid ſo fair for heaven, ſhould break with God upon this ſingle point?

I know men have ſeveral ways to deceive their own hearts, and to defend themſelves againſt all theſe aſſaults.

Firſt, They ſay, they are injurious to no man, in not being charitable. And 'tis true, that in human courts the poor can have no action againſt the rich for want of charity to them; but yet for all that, they do injuriouſly detain that which doth not of right belong to them. They are cruel and hard-hearted, and they are guilty of a high breach of truſt, in reſpect of God, whoſe ſtewards they are, and who hath dealt ſo liberally with them in the things of this life, on purpoſe to oblige them to be ſo to others. That which thou ſtoreſt up, without regard to the neceſſities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, ſince God intended it ſhould have been *for bread to the hungry*, and *cloaths to the naked*, and for help and relief *of thoſe who are ready to periſh*. For why art thou rich, and another poor; but that thou mighteſt exerciſe thy charity upon thoſe fitting objects which the providence of God preſents to thee? It had been eaſy for God (ſince *the earth is his, and the fulneſs thereof*) ſo to have contrived things, that every man ſhould have had a ſufficiency, and have been in a moderate condition; but then a great many virtues would have been ſhut out of the world, and loſt, for want of opportunity to exerciſe them. Where then had been the poor man's patience, and the rich man's pity, and the contentedneſs of men of moderate fortune?

Secondly, Men ſay that they have children to provide for. And do ſo in God's name, for he allows us to do it liberally; but unleſs their condition and wealth ſet them above an ordinary calling, do not chooſe ſo to provide for them, as to take them off from all employment, leſt you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a care of leaving them no other buſineſs, but to ſpend what you have left them; if you do ſo, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haſte to be poor, as you did to make them rich. If men could be but contented to do that which is beſt for their children, they might do a great deal better for themſelves, by diſpoſing what they have to ſpare in charity.

Thirdly, Others would fain excuſe themſelves from this duty at preſent by telling what they intend to do when they come to die, that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It ſeems then thou wilt leave it to thy executor to do good in thy ſtead. This ſhews thou haſt no great heart to the buſineſs, when thou deferreſt it as long as ever thou canſt. But why wilt thou truſt another with the diſpoſal of thy charity, rather than thyſelf? This is hardly to offer either a *reaſonable*, or a *living ſacrifice to God*, to do good only when we are dead. It is well that God hath made all men mortal, and that *it is appointed for all men once to die*; otherwiſe ſome men would never do good at all.

Wherefore ſetting aſide theſe, and all other excuſes, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the face to plead them at the day of judgment; I ſay, ſetting aſide all excuſes whatſoever, let us reſolve to do good with what we have whilſt we can; and to that end let us lay aſide ſome portion of what God hath bleſt us withal, for the uſes of piety, and charity, and let it bear ſome decent proportion to what God hath given us.

There is never want of proper objects for our largeſt charity, and now leſs than ever. Beſides theſe at home, which preſent themſelves to us in great numbers every day, God hath ſent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greateſt extremity, and are ſufferers in the beſt cauſe, that of our common religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us ſhew mercy now, as we expect mercy from others, in any day of our diſtreſs in this world, and as ever we hope, whenever we come to appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, *to find mercy with the Lord in that day*.

Conſider what I have ſaid upon this argument, and let this extraordinary kind of caution, which our Saviour here gives, make a deep impreſſion upon your minds; *Take heed and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

SERMON XL.

Religion, our firſt and great Concernment.

Matt. vi. 33.

But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.

IN the latter part of this chapter, our Saviour doth in a long diſcourſe caution his diſciples againſt an inordinate care about the things of this life, which he concludes with a ſtrict charge to make religion their firſt and great concernment, and above all things to take care to ſecure to themſelves the happineſs of another life; *But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, &c. In the handling of which words, I ſhall do theſe *four* things.

Firſt, I ſhall explain what is here meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.*

Secondly, What by *ſeeking* of theſe.

Thirdly, I ſhall lay down ſome neceſſary and plain directions, which if we obſerve, we cannot miſcarry in this matter.

Fourthly, I ſhall ſet before you ſome of the moſt proper and powerful motives and encouragements to the minding of this great intereſt and concernment; among which, I ſhall particularly conſider the argument or encouragement here uſed in the text, *and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

Firſt, I ſhall explain to you what is here meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.*

I. What is meant by *the kingdom of God.* And there are two famous acceptations of this phraſe, and both of them very frequent in the New Teſtament. Sometimes it is uſed to ſignify the ſtate of the Goſpel, or the chriſtian religion, which by the *Jews* was called *the kingdom of God*, or *the kingdom of the Meſſias*, Mark i. 15. *The kingdom of God is at hand*; that is, the ſtate or diſpenſation of the Goſpel is now approaching, and ready to take place. *Luke* xvii. 20. the *Phariſees* demanding of our Saviour, *when the kingdom of God ſhould come*, that is, when the reign of the *Meſſias* ſhould commence; he anſwers them, *the kingdom of God cometh not with obſervation*; that is, not with any temporal pomp and ſplendor, ſo as to draw the eyes of people after it, as the *Jews* did vainly imagine; but *the kingdom of God*, ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐϛὶν, *is among you*, not *within you* as our tranſlation hath improperly render'd it; *the kingdom of God* (he tells them) is already come unto you, the *Meſſias* is among you, and ye are not aware of him. In the like ſenſe this phraſe is uſed, *Matt.* xxi. 43. *The kingdom of God* (that is, the Goſpel) *ſhall be taken from you, and given to a Nation, bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And ſo likewiſe the phraſe of *the kingdom of heaven* is uſed, *Matt.* xi. 11. where, ſpeaking of *John* the baptiſt, our Saviour ſaith, that *among them that were born of women, there hath not riſen a greater than John the baptiſt*; that is, there was no greater perſon than he, under the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation, *and yet he that is leaſt in the kingdom of heaven*, that is, under the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, *is greater than he.*

Now though this ſenſe of *the kingdom of God* be not wholly excluded in the text, yet there is another ſenſe of this phraſe very uſual likewiſe in the ſcripture, and which is more agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour's argument and diſcourſe, and ſo it ſignifies that future ſtate of happineſs and glory which good men ſhall be advanced to in another world, in oppoſition to this life, and the enjoyments of it, which our Saviour had before forbidden his diſciples to be ſo ſolicitous about. *Take ye no thought, ſaying, what ſhall we eat? or what ſhall we drink? or wherewithal ſhall we be clothed?* And then it follows in direct oppoſition to this inordinate and ſolicitous care about worldly things, *but ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs.* That is, be not ſo ſolicitous about the conveniences and neceſſaries of this life, as about the happineſs of the other, and the means to it. And this ſenſe of this phraſe of *the kingdom of God* is ſo very frequent in the New Teſtament, that I ſhall not need to give particular inſtances of it.

II. What is meant by righteouſneſs; *ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.* *Righteouſneſs*, in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper ſenſe of the word, ſignifies the particular virtue of juſtice; and very frequently in the Old Teſtament it is uſed for charity to the poor, or almſgiving, *Pſal.* xxxvii. 25, 26. *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth*; and *Pſal.* cxii. 9. *he hath diſperſed, he hath given to the poor, his righteouſneſs endureth for ever.* But *righteouſneſs* in its largeſt and moſt extended ſenſe, comprehends all the virtues of a good man; and ſo it ſignifies here in the text, and in many other places of ſcripture.

So *that the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* comprehends the whole buſineſs of religion, our *laſt end,* which is *eternal life and happineſs* in another world, and *the way and means* to this end; which is *righteouſneſs,* or that univerſal goodneſs which God requires of us, and whereof he himſelf is a pattern and example to us; for which reaſon it is called *his righteouſneſs.* And in this ſenſe of *our laſt end, and the way and means* to it, *the kingdom of heaven,* and *righteouſneſs,* are uſed in another place, even of this Sermon of our Saviour's upon the mount, *Matth.* v. 20. *Except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven*; where *righteouſneſs* is made the neceſſary means and condition of eternal life. I proceed in the

Second place, to explain what is meant by *ſeeking firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.* And this ſignifies the greateſt intention of mind, and earneſtneſs of endeavour about the buſineſs of religion, in order to our attaining of eternal happineſs; ſuch a ſeriouſneſs and earneſtneſs of endeavour as earthly-minded men uſe about the things of this world. *For after all theſe things* (ſays our Saviour immediately after the text) *do the Gentiles ſeek*; τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ, which words ſignify an intenſe care, and vigorous endeavour; *but ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; that is, be ye, who profeſs yourſelves Chriſtians, as intent upon the buſineſs of religion, and the ſalvation of your ſouls, as the heathen, who are in a great meaſure ignorant of God and another life, are about the things of this life.

And here are two things to be explained.

I. What is here meant by *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; and,

II. What by *ſeeking them in the firſt place.*

For the *firſt*: A ſincere and earneſt *ſeeking of the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* does imply it in theſe four things.

1. A fixed deſign and reſolution as to the end; that we do not only propound to ourſelves the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of our ſouls, as our chief end, but that we be immoveably fixed upon it; and always have it in our aim and deſign; that here we ſet up our reſolution, if it be poſſible, to be happy for ever; that we have this end always in our eye, and be firmly reſolved to do all that we can towards attaining it.

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it; but to have it frequently in our minds, and habitually to intend and deſign it, ſo as to make it the ſcope of all our endeavours and actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or ſome way or other ſubſervient to this deſign, or however not inconſiſtent with it; like the term and end of a man's journey, towards which the traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his intention, though he doth not always think of it every ſtep that he takes, and though he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the way. And though he bait and lodge by the way, and does many other things which do not directly ſet him forward, yet they are all ſubſervient to his journey, or in proſecution of it; or at leaſt no wilful deviations from it. Thus it ſhould be with us, while we are ſojourning in this world; our fixed aim and deſign ſhould be to get to heaven, and thither we ſhould be continually tending in our deſires and endeavours.

And if this reſolution be deeply rooted and fixed in our minds, it will govern all our actions, and keep them ſteddy to their main end. Whereas, if we be uncertain, and unreſolved upon our great end, and be divided between the happineſs of the next life, and the preſent enjoyments of this, we ſhall be fickle and unſteddy in all our motions. He that hath two ends, can purſue neither vigorouſly, but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other; and like a needle between two loadſtones, is always in a doubtful and trembling condition; inclines to both, but is conſtant to neither: And this is the meaning of that aphoriſm of St. *James, the double-minded man is unſtable in all his ways.* He that is unreſolved as to his main end, hath two minds, and can proſecute nothing vigorouſly: But if our mind be once fixed and reſolved, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inſpire us with diligence, and zeal, and perſeverance in the proſecution of our end.

2. *Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs,* implies inceſſant care and diligence as to the means; that we make religion our buſineſs, and exerciſe ourſelves in the duties of it, both in publick and private, at proper times and ſeaſons, with the ſame ſeriouſneſs and application of mind, as men do in their callings and profeſſions, for the gaining of wealth and preferment; eſpecially on the *Lord's-day,* which God hath taken to himſelf, and ſet apart for the duties of his worſhip and ſervice. Not that we are excuſed from minding religion at other times; but that thoſe who are preſſed and ſtraitened by the neceſſary cares of this life, may be ſure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuſe for the neglect of it at that time, which God hath allotted for that very purpoſe, and which it is unlawful to employ about our worldly affairs. God expects that we ſhould ſerve him at other times, that we ſhould live in an habitual ſenſe of him, and (as *Solomon* expreſſeth it, *Prov.* xxiii. 17.) *Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long;* ſo as to be careful not to offend or tranſgreſs in any thing, and ſo as to redeem all opportunities for the exerciſe of piety and devotion; but *this day* he peremptorily challengeth to himſelf, and expects we ſhould employ it in his ſervice, and dedicate it to religion, to the contemplation of God and heavenly things, and the care of our immortal ſouls, with the ſame ſeriouſneſs and diligence, as we do upon other days *labour for the bread which periſheth;* and the leſs leiſure we have upon other days for this purpoſe, the more entirely ſhould we devote and conſecrate *this day* to the purpoſes and duties of religion.

Not but that our whole life, and all the actions of it, ſhould be under the government of religion, and directed by the laws and rules of it; and it ſhould be our continual care and endeavour to pleaſe God in all things, and we ſhould take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good men, as the men of the world are to grow rich and great in this world; nay ſo much more, by how much it is a better and nobler deſign to improve in grace and virtue, than to proſper and thrive in our temporal eſtate; and we do not in good earneſt *ſeek the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs,* if this be not our great ſtudy and endeavour, to ſubdue our luſts, and govern our paſſions, and in a word, to reform whatever is amiſs in the inward frame and temper of our minds, and in our outward converſation. And indeed nothing does require greater diligence, and attention, and care, than for a man to become truly and thoroughly good, to be meek, and humble, and patient, and contented, and reſigned to the will of God in every condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready to forgive; theſe are great and difficult things, and whatever we think, not the work of a wiſh, or the effect of a ſudden reſolution before the receiving of the holy ſacrament, no, nor the fruit of frequent and fervent prayer, without the hearty concurrence of our own care and endeavour, to render our lives ſuch, as we pray God by his grace to aſſiſt and enable us to be.

3. *Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs,* does further imply zeal and earneſtneſs in the purſuit of this deſign: And this is a degree above diligence; for zeal is an ardour and fervency of mind in the proſecution of a thing for which we are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently deſire to obtain; it is the hotteſt and moſt intenſe degree of our affection towards any thing, of our deſire and love, mixed with anger at every thing that ſtands in our way and hinders us from obtaining what we ſeek after; ſuch an heat as ambition does commonly inſpire men withal, in the purſuit of power and preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our minds, and the edge of our ſpirits, in *ſeeking the kingdom of God,* as does uſually poſſeſs men in ſeeking the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them. We muſt remember that it is *a kingdom* which we ſeek for, and aſpire after; not like the unſtable and tottering kingdoms of this world, but *a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken,* as the Apoſtle calls it.

So that the greatneſs of the deſign, and the excellency of what we ſeek after, will juſtify and warrant the higheſt degree of a diſcreet zeal and fervour in the proſecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the ſcripture in this matter uſeth words that import the greateſt vehemency and earneſtneſs, bidding us *to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait* *gate, to labour and watch, to run and wreſtle, and fight,* and in a word, *to give all deligence, to make our calling and election ſure.*

Laſtly, *Seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* does imply patience and perſeverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never ceaſe our purſuit of them, 'till we have obtained them; and this, notwithſtanding all the difficulties and diſcouragements, the oppoſition and perſecution that we meet with *for righteouſneſs ſake:* For this we muſt expect and reckon upon before-hand, to encounter many difficulties, and find many diſcouragements in the ways of religion; for *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life,* as our Lord himſelf hath told us: nay, we muſt count to be grievouſly *perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake,* and, if God ſee it good for us, *to paſs through many tribulations,* before we ſhall enter *into the kingdom of God*; and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of patience, and a very firm and obſtinate reſolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out againſt all theſe; for this is a neceſſary qualification for our *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.* So our Lord hath told us, *Matth.* x. 22. *he that endureth to the end, ſhall be ſaved*; if we *hope to receive the crown of life,* we muſt *be faithful to the death,* Rev. ii. 10. And to the ſame purpoſe St. *Paul* declares, *Rom.* ii. 7. that they only ſhall be made partakers of *eternal life, who by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory, and honour and immortality.*

You ſee what is meant by *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; it remains briefly to be ſhewn, in the *ſecond* place, what is meant by *ſeeking theſe firſt*; *ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; that is, let this be your main and principal deſign, ſo as to take place of all others in your eſteem and affections, in your aim and endeavour; in compariſon of this, mind nothing elſe, not the comforts and conveniencies, no not the neceſſaries of life, *what ye ſhall eat, and what ye ſhall drink, and wherewithal ye ſhall be clothed.* Theſe you ſee our Saviour inſtanceth in before the text, as not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come in competition with *the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.* And our Saviour tells us elſewhere, that not only none of the comforts and neceſſaries of life are to be valued againſt him, and his religion, but that even this temporal life itſelf, as dear as it is to us, is to be parted withal, and given up, rather than to quit the profeſſion of his truth and religion, *Matth.* x. 37, 38. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth ſon or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.* He inſtanceth in the neareſt relations, thoſe towards whom we have the moſt tender and relenting affections, and yet he tells us, that the conſideration of his truth and religion ought to take place of theſe, nay, even of life itſelf; for ſo it follows, and *he that taketh not his croſs, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* St. *Luke* expreſſeth it more ſtrongly and vehemently, *Luke* xiv. 26. *If any man come to me* (that is, take upon him the profeſſion of my religion) *and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and ſiſters, yea and his own life alſo, he cannot be my diſciple.* When theſe come in competition with our religion, and the great intereſt of our eternal ſalvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the objects of our hatred, but to ſet aſide all conſideration of affection to them, ſo far as it would tempt us from conſtancy in our religion, and the care of our ſouls.

So that when our Saviour bids us *firſt to ſeek the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs,* his meaning is, that religion, and the concernments of our ſouls, and the eternal happineſs of them in another world, ſhould be our firſt and chief care; and that all other things ſhould be made ſubordinate and ſubſervient to this great deſign, and be no farther minded by us, than they really are ſo: For that which is our great end, will ſubdue all other things, and bring them into ſubjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aſide, if they be inconſiſtent with it. If heaven be our utmoſt aim, and in order to that, it be our great ſtudy and endeavour to be righteous and holy, this reſolution and deſign, ſincerely entertained, will over-rule all other conſiderations, and make all the things of this world to ſtoop and give way to that which is our chief end, the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of our ſouls. And thus I have done with the *ſecond* thing I propoſed, namely, what is meant by *ſeeking the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*; and what by *ſeeking them firſt.*

I proceed in the *third* place, to lay down ſome plain rules for our direction and furtherance *in ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; that is, in the great buſineſs of religion.

Firſt, Let us always live under a lively and powerful ſenſe of another world; that we are placed here in this world, but for a little while, and *that* wholly in order to our preparation for a better and happier life. Let this thought be often in your minds: That eternity is the moſt conſiderable duration, and the next world the place of our everlaſting abode, where we muſt dwell and continue for ever; and therefore our preſent ſtate is but of little moment and conſideration to us, but only in order to our future and everlaſting condition. We may pleaſe ourſelves here for a little while with toys and trifles, with dreams and ſhadows of pleaſure and happineſs, and may be exerciſed with ſome troubles and afflictions for a ſhort ſpace, *for a moment* (as the Apoſtle calls it) *our light afflictions which are but for a moment*, and ſo indeed it is, compared with all eternity; but the ſubſtantial and durable happineſs or miſery remain for men in the other world, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themſelves in this world.

Now the ſerious conſideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous preparations for another world, and to make us wholly intent upon our eternal concernments, and to reſolve, whatever becomes of us in this world, to take effectual care that we may be happy for ever. He that firmly believes the immortality of his ſoul, and a life after death, which will never have an end, muſt needs take into conſideration his whole duration, and bend all his care and thoughts, how he may avoid the greateſt and moſt laſting miſery, and ſecure to himſelf an immortality of bliſs and happineſs.

Secondly, Let us always be under a conviction of the abſolute and indiſpenſable neceſſity of holineſs and righteouſneſs, as the only way and means whereby the kingdom of God is to be attained, and that holineſs and happineſs are not to be ſeparated, the one being a neceſſary condition and qualification for the other; and conſequently, that it is the vaineſt thing in the world for any man to hope to enter into the *kingdom of God*, without endeavouring after *his righteouſneſs*; there is ſo ſtrong a connexion between them, that a man may as reaſonably expect to be well and at eaſe without health, as to be happy without holineſs; for this makes us like to God, and our likeneſs and conformity to God, is that alone which can make us capable of the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God. We muſt be *partakers of the divine nature*, in order to our participation of the divine bleſſedneſs. And the conſideration of this will effectually engage us to *ſeek the righteouſneſs of God*, without which we ſhall never enter into *his kingdom*; and to follow *holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

Thirdly, let us always remember that *righteouſneſs* is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodneſs; it takes in all the duties of religion, and the practice of all of them: it is a complication of all graces and virtues, of all the parts and ingredients, of all the duties and offices of a good man. To denominate a man *righteous*, all cauſes muſt concur; all the eſſential principles and parts of religion and goodneſs muſt meet together; knowledge and practice, faith and good works, right opinions and real virtues, an orthodox profeſſion and a holy life, abſtaining from ſin and doing of righteouſneſs, purity of heart and unſpotted manners, godlineſs and honeſty, the bridling of our tongue, and the government of our paſſions, *and above all things charity, which is the band of perfection.*

For *righteouſneſs* is our conformity to the law of God, as *unrighteouſneſs* and ſin is the tranſgreſſion of it: Now this, if it be real and ſincere, will be uniform and univerſal, equally reſpecting all the laws of God, and every part of our known duty, and will not content itſelf with an eſpecial regard to one or two precepts of the law, though never ſo conſiderable, and then allow itſelf in the neglect and violation of the reſt, no, nor with the obſervation of the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no, nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. *James* hath put this very caſe, and determined it, That *he that ſhall keep the whole law, ſave only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all*; that is, he is not ſincere in his obedience to the reſt: And therefore if we *ſeek the righteouſneſs of God*, our righteouſneſs muſt be univerſal; *as he that hath called us is holy, ſo muſt we be holy in all manner of converſation*, in the tenor of our actions, and the whole courſe of our lives: and any one reigning ſin and vice, any groſs and notorious defect in the virtues of a good life, will ſpoil all our *righteouſneſs*, and will effectually ſhut us out of *the kingdom of heaven.*

Fourthly, Let us wiſely ſubordinate the ſeveral parts and duties of religion to one another, according to the intrinſical worth and value of them, that ſo we may mind every part of religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it.

Knowledge and faith are in order to practice, and a good life; and ſignify nothing unleſs they produce that; the means of religion, ſuch as prayer and faſting, diligent reading and hearing the word of God, reverent and devout receiving of the bleſſed ſacrament, are of leſs account and value, than that which is the end of all theſe, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and *fruitful in all the works of righteouſneſs, which by Jeſus Chriſt are to the praiſe and glory of God.* And therefore the means of religion which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and uſed by us, in order to the attaining of theſe ends, without which they are mere formality and hypocriſy, and inſtead of finding acceptance with God, they are *an abomination to him, and his ſoul hates them.*

And ſo likewiſe the circumſtances of religion are leſs conſiderable than the ſubſtantial means and inſtruments of it. And therefore all rites and ceremonies are in religion of leſs conſideration, than the ſubſtance of God's worſhip, and ought always to be ſubordinate to it. In like manner, the moral duties of religion, comprehended under *the two great commandments of the love of God*, and *our neighbour*, becauſe they are of eternal and indiſpenſable obligation, are to be preferred to matters of mere poſitive inſtitution; and where they cannot ſtand together, that which is poſitive ought to be ſet aſide, and to give way for the preſent to that which is moral and good in its own nature, and not only becauſe it is commanded and enjoined; for in this caſe God hath expreſly declared, that *he will have mercy and not ſacrifice.* Upon which ground our Saviour declares, that the law of the *ſabbath* ought to give place to *works of mercy.* Upon the ſame account peace and charity are to be valued above matters of nicety and ſcruple, of doubtful diſpute and controverſy; becauſe the former are unqueſtionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly ſo.

All theſe things ought to be conſidered, and are of great moment to make a man ſincerely and wiſely religious. For men may keep a great ſtir about ſome parts of religion, and be very careful and diligent, zealous and earneſt about the means and inſtruments of religion, and in the exerciſes of piety and devotion, and yet be deſtitute of the power and life of it, and fall ſhort of that inward, and real, and ſubſtantial *righteouſneſs*, which alone can qualify us for *the kingdom of God.*

The *fifth* and laſt direction I would give, is this; That we have a particular regard to the great duty of charity, or alms-giving, this being very frequently in ſcripture called *righteouſneſs*, as being an eminent part of religion, and a great evidence of the truth and ſincerity of our piety. And this our Saviour particularly directs to, as the way to *the kingdom of God*, Luke xii. 33. After this general exhortation, *to ſeek the kingdom of God*, he inſtanceth in *charity*, as the direct way to it; *give alms, provide for yourſelves bags that wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens which faileth not.* And elſewhere our Saviour ſpeaks of this grace and virtue, as that which, above all others, will make way for our admiſſion into heaven, *Luke* xvi. 9. *I ſay unto yon, make to yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye fail, they may receive you* (or ye may be received) *into everlaſting habitations.* And St. *Paul* calls it, *laying up in ſtore for ourſelves a good foundation*; or (as the word may better be rendred in this place) *a good treaſure againſt the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life*, 1 Tim. vi. 19. St. *James* ſpeaks of it, as a main and moſt eſſential part of religion, and the great evidence of a true and ſincere piety; *Jam.* i. 27. *Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction.* Finally, our Lord inſtanceth in this, as the very thing which will admit us into, or ſhut us out of heaven; by the performance whereof we ſhall be abſolved, and for the neglect whereof we ſhall be condemned in the judgment of the great day, *Matth.* xxv. So that this part of righteouſneſs or religion, ought in a more eſpecial manner to be regarded by us; becauſe upon the performance or neglect of this duty, our eternal happineſs doth ſo much depend.

The *fourth* and laſt thing only remains to be ſpoken to; which is, to ſet before you the moſt proper and powerful motives and encouragements, to the minding of this great intereſt and concernment. But this will be the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

SERMON XLI.

The ſecond Sermon on this Text.

Religion, our firſt and great Concernment.

MATTH. vi. 33.

But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.

THESE words, which I began to diſcourſe upon the laſt day, are a ſtrict charge and command to all Chriſtians, to mind the buſineſs of religion in the firſt place, and to take all imaginable care to ſecure the happineſs of another life; *But ſeek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.* In the handling of which argument,

Firſt, I explained what is meant *by the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs.*

Secondly, I ſhewed what is meant by *ſeeking* theſe; and what by *ſeeking them firſt.*

Thirdly, I laid down ſome rules for our direction and furtherance in this great buſineſs.

I ſhall now proceed to repreſent to you, in the

Fourth and *laſt* place, ſome of the moſt proper and powerful arguments and encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great intereſt and concernment: amongſt which, I ſhall in the laſt place particularly conſider the encouragement here given in the *text*, *Seek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

Firſt, My firſt argument ſhall be from the worth and excellency of the things we ſeek, *the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*; which are certainly the greateſt and beſt things we can ſeek. *The kingdom of God*, is the eternal ſalvation of our ſouls, everlaſting life and happineſs in another world, which, to animate our endeavours, and to tempt our ambition the more, are ſet forth to us under the notion of a *kingdom*. And what will not men do to obtain that? what pains will they not take? what hazards will they not run? what difficulties will they not grapple with, and break through if they can, to come to *a kingdom?* which when they have obtained, they are expoſed to as many, and commonly to more cares and fears, to greater difficulties and dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it: And yet all this men will do for *a corruptible crown*, for one of the petty kingdoms and principalities of this world, which are continually tottering, and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be undermined by ſecret treachery. But *the kingdom* which I am ſpeaking of, and perſuading you and myſelf to ſeek after, is not like the kingdoms of men, and of this world; it is called *the kingdom of God*, to ſignify to us the excellency and ſtability of it; as much beyond any of the kingdoms of this world, as the heavens are high above the earth, and as God is greater than man; *a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken, a crown which fadeth not away*, a ſcepter which cannot be wreſted from us.

But to quit the metaphor, and ſpeak to the thing; *the kingdom of God* imports the eternal ſalvation of our ſouls; I ſay of our *ſouls*, which both in reſpect of the dignity of their nature, and their immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the periſhing things of this world, and ought to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither conſtitute our being, nor are eſſential to our happineſs; but our ſouls are ourſelves, and the loſs of them is our utter ruin and deſtruction. So that nothing is to be regarded by us with equal care and concernment, as the ſalvation of our immortal ſouls; that is, that we may be reſcued from eternal miſery, and everlaſtingly happy in another world. And can we be at too much coſt and pains upon ſuch a deſign, to eſcape ſo diſmal a condition, ſo dreadful a ruin, as that of body and ſoul to all eternity? Can any man be concerned enough to bring about ſo great a good to himſelf? or, can he purchaſe it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good ſo deſirable, and ſo durable, as our being happy for ever. When we purchaſe the things of this world, the riches and honours of it, at the expence of ſo much time, and care, and trouble, we pay dear for trifles and fancies; but eternal happineſs is a jewel of ſo ineſtimable a price, that a wiſe merchant will have it at any rate, and *ſell all that he hath to purchaſe it.*

Of ſuch value is *the kingdom of God*; and next to it is *righteouſneſs*, which is the only way and means whereby this *kingdom* is to be attained, and therefore to be ſought by us with the greateſt diligence and earneſtneſs: For that which is the only means to a great and deſirable end, and which alone can make us capable of that end, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the end, and almoſt equally with it; and ſuch is *righteouſneſs*, in reſpect of *the kingdom of God*; it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of happineſs; nay, it is an eſſential ingredient into it, and that which does in a great meaſure conſtitute the happineſs of heaven: for that temper of mind, that conformity and likeneſs to God, which holineſs and righteouſneſs brings us to, is the true foundation of our happineſs, and according to the beſt apprehenſions we have now of it, is the very formal cauſe and eſſence of our bleſſedneſs. So St. *John* tells us, 1 *John* iii. 2. *It doth not yet appear what we ſhall be; but we know that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him*; that is, we do not now diſtinctly underſtand wherein the happineſs of the next life conſiſts, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect idea of it; but this we know in general, that it conſiſts in our likeneſs to God, in a conformity to the moral perfections of the divine nature, which are expreſt by the name of *purity* and *holineſs*; and therefore every one that hopes for the happineſs of heaven, muſt endeavour after holineſs; *every man that hath this hope in him, muſt purify himſelf, even as he is pure.*

So that the things which I am preſſing you to ſeek after, are moſt effectually recommended, by telling you what they are; *the kingdom of God* is eternal life and happineſs, and *his righteouſneſs* is univerſal holineſs and goodneſs, without which no man is qualified for this bleſſed ſtate. Now if there be any thing better than goodneſs, any thing more deſirable than a happineſs which hath no bounds, nor no end; do not mind them, nor look after them: But if there be not; then certainly theſe are worthy of the care and endeavour of our whole life.

Secondly, Another conſideration that ſhould very much excite and quicken our endeavour and diligence in ſeeking theſe things, is the difficulty of obtaining them. This I confeſs, is no encouragement, but it is a very good motive and argument to whet our induſtry in ſeeking theſe things, when we plainly ſee that they are not to be had upon other terms. And this conſideration our Saviour uſeth to quicken us to *ſtrive* and to contend earneſtly for eternal life, *Matth.* vii. 14. *Becauſe ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it:* And *Luke* xiii. 24. *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

Seeking here, in oppoſition to *ſtriving*, is a faint and weak endeavour, which will not carry us through this narrow and difficult paſſage; and this is the reaſon why many miſcarry, who made ſome attempts towards heaven; but they do not *ſtrive*, they do not put forth any vigorous endeavours to get thither.

Now the difficulty of attaining eternal happineſs, ariſeth from the difficulty of the way and means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain *the kingdom of God*, becauſe it is hard to attain *his righteouſneſs.* As deſirable as it is, it muſt be acknowledged very difficult for a man to raiſe himſelf to that temper and diſpoſition of mind, ſo to ſubdue his luſts, and govern his paſſions, to bridle his tongue, and order all the actions of his life, as is neceſſary to qualify him for happineſs, and to make him fit to be admitted into *the kingdom of God.*

And this difficulty is chiefly in ourſelves, but greatly increaſed by temptation and oppoſition from without: Chiefly, I ſay, in ourſelves, from the ſtrong bias of our evil and corrupt inclinations, and the ſtrong power of vitious habits and cuſtoms, which when they are grown inveterate, do tyrannize over us, and make us perfect ſlaves, and lead us captive at their pleaſure; ſo that our nature muſt be quite changed, and as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it, we muſt be *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds*, our ſouls muſt be new moulded and faſhioned, we muſt be, as it were, *created*, and *born again*, before we can *enter into the kingdom of God.* In this our Saviour is poſitive and peremptory, *John* iii. 3. *Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot ſee*

ſee the kingdom of God. This difficulty indeed is greateſt at firſt, but it is conſiderable afterwards, 'till a thorough change be made, and new inclinations planted in us, and the contrary habits of grace and virtue be ſuper-induced.

And that which increaſeth the difficulty is outward temptation and oppoſition from the world, and the devil; which to withſtand and reſiſt, requires great courage and reſolution, great watchfulneſs and guard over ourſelves. But yet for our comfort, theſe difficulties are not inſuperable to that grace and aſſiſtance, which God is always ready to afford to us upon ſo good an occaſion, and to ſo good a purpoſe; *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* And this, I am ſure, is matter of great encouragement to us, that though the difficulty of *working out our ſalvation* be great, yet if we do in good earneſt ſet about it, God is ready to aſſiſt and ſecond our ſincere endeavours, *to work in us both to will and to do of his own goodneſs,* and ſo to prevent us with his gracious favour, and to further us with his continual aid, that finally by his mercy we may obtain eternal life.

Thirdly, Another powerful argument to care and diligence, is the fatal danger of miſcarriage in a matter of ſo great concernment. We may do many things in religion, and take ſome pains to get to heaven, and yet fall ſhort of it. The rich young man in the Goſpel, our Saviour tells us, was *not far from the kingdom of God,* and he broke with our Saviour only upon one point, he was too much addicted to the world, and loth to part with his great poſſeſſions, and diſtribute them in charity to the poor, and thereupon he left our Saviour, and, for any thing we can find, never returned to him again.

If the world govern and bear ſway in our hearts, if we *mind earthly things* firſt, and make theſe our chief care and deſign, *the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs* ſhall not *be added unto us*; if we will not mind them *in the firſt place,* they are too good to be acceſſaries.

And if upon any one point we miſcarry either out of love to the world, or affection to any other luſt or vice that we are loth to part withal, our miſcarriage is fatal, and the ruin which we bring upon ourſelves irreparable; for the ſoul once loſt, is loſt for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of *working out our own ſalvation,* while we are in this world, it will never return into our power again, death will ſhut the door againſt us, and we ſhall never *ſee the kingdom of God.*

Fourthly, It is a mighty encouragement to us to conſider, that if we ſincerely *ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the ſecurity we can deſire. Men may be in good earneſt for the things of this world, may love them with all their hearts and ſouls (as we ſee too many do) and ſeek them with all their might and ſtrength, and yet after all, their endeavours may be ſhamefully fruſtrated and diſappointed of their end. There are many examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet men are not diſcouraged from ſeeking theſe things. A fair probability, nay, almoſt a poſſibility of attaining them, is enough to a worldly-minded man to drudge and toil for them. Why; the ſame affection, the ſame zeal, the ſame unwearied endeavour to pleaſe God, and to ſave our ſouls, would infallibly bring us to heaven. It was a ſad but true ſaying of cardinal *Wolſey,* when he was leaving the world, "Had I been but as careful to pleaſe God, as I have been to ſerve "my prince, he would not have forſaken me now in the time of my gray hairs."

Nay, it is to be hoped, that leſs diligence and care about the concernments of our ſouls, and another life, than many men uſe about the things of this life, will ſecure our eternal happineſs, or elſe it is to be feared, that but very few would be ſaved: And who would not place his induſtry and endeavour upon a deſign in which he is ſure not to miſcarry, if he do but heartily and in good earneſt purſue it? eſpecially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any deſign he can propound to himſelf for this world. If a man may be certainly happy for ever, upon the ſame or eaſier terms, than he can ordinarily compaſs any of thoſe little deſigns which men propoſe to themſelves in this world, who would not ſeek that which is moſt worthy the having, and which he is ſureſt to maintain.

Fifthly and *laſtly,* The encouragement here in the text is not inconſiderable; that if we *ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, all theſe things ſhall be added unto us.* This certainly is a very tempting conſideration; for who would not be glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this world with the hopes of heaven and eternal happineſs? But men do not generally like our Saviour's method, they would ſeek the things of this world in the firſt place, and get to heaven at laſt; they would be content to ſeek the one, and have the other caſt in and conferred upon them, without their ſeeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our Saviour has gone as far as one would think could in reaſon be deſired; he hath promiſed that if we will make religion, and the ſalvation of our ſouls, our firſt and chief care, that *all theſe things ſhall be added unto us.* So that the deſign of going to heaven, and being happy for ever, is no ways inconſiſtent with a competent portion of the things of this life. *Godlineſs* (the Apoſtle tells us) *hath the promiſe of this life, and of that which is to come.* The buſineſs of religion, the practice of a holy and virtuous life, is no hindrance to a man's thriving in his temporal eſtate; nay, in many reſpects it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our calling, and by deriving the bleſſing of God upon our honeſt and lawful endeavours; by obliging us to the ſtrict and conſtant practice of truth, and juſtice, and fidelity in all our dealings and commerce, which are the beſt way to eſtabliſh a clear and ſolid reputation, and good eſteem among men, which is an unſpeakable advantage in buſineſs, and, at the long run, one of the beſt and moſt laſting inſtruments of proſperity and ſucceſs.

Beſides, that religion frees a man from thoſe paſſions and vices, which do naturally tend to diſſipate and ruin mens eſtates; as intemperance and lewdneſs, which are every way chargeable vices, and do not only take men off from buſineſs, and render them unfit for it; but waſte their eſtates, and bring many other inconveniences upon their perſons and families. Religion makes men meek, and peaceable, and inoffenſive in word and deed, which is a great ſecurity againſt chargeable ſuits and contentions, and all ſorts of injuries and affronts from others. Among all the beatitudes of our Saviour, he only promiſeth temporal happineſs to meekneſs, *bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.* They who provoke and offend no body, are likely to be leaſt diſturbed and diſquieted by others in their poſſeſſions and enjoyments; *Who will harm you* (ſaith the Apoſtle, 1 *Peter* iii. 13.) *if ye be followers of that which is good?* Some may be ſo perverſe as to perſecute a man for his goodneſs; but it rarely happens; moſt men have not only a kindneſs, but a veneration for true goodneſs.

By all theſe ways religion naturally tends to the temporal proſperity of men, and the promoting of their welfare and happineſs even in this world; beſides that the providence of God is very peculiarly concerned for good men, and a ſpecial bleſſing attends them in all their undertakings. So that excepting the caſe of perſecution (which God will particularly conſider, and reward in another world) the religious and good man, who ſincerely *ſeeks the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs,* ſtands as fair, and is upon as good terms, for all the lawful enjoyments of this world, as he that makes it his only deſign to be rich and great in this world; nay, as to the neceſſaries of this life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better ſecurity from the providence and promiſe of God, than the men of the world have by all their care and pains.

Beſides, that he hath this conſiderable advantage, by minding theſe things only as acceſſaries, that if he miſs of them, he hath ſomething better to ſupport him in the want of them; being ſecure of a happineſs which this world can neither give nor take from him. But now the worldly man, if he be defeated in his deſigns, is of all men moſt miſerable, becauſe he hath nothing elſe to comfort him, nothing elſe to truſt to; he fails of his hopes as to this world, and hath done what in him lies to make his caſe deſperate as to the other.

Upon all theſe conſiderations and encouragements, you ſee how reaſonable it is, that we ſhould make religion, and the concernment of another life, our great care and buſineſs. And yet how are theſe neglected by the greateſt part of mankind! and by the beſt of us (God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deſerve! What can we ſay for ourſelves in excuſe of ſo intolerable a folly? There are two or three things which men commonly pretend, if not in juſtification, yet in mitigation and excuſe of this great neglect.

Firſt, They pretend great difficulties and diſcouragements in the ways of religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, ſo far as to awaken our care, and to whet our induſtry; but by no means to make us deſpond and give over all care of ſo great a concernment, becauſe of the difficulties it is attended withal. Men who have no mind to a thing, are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnify them in their fancies beyond reaſon. As the people of *Iſrael,* when they were to enter into *Canaan* (which was the type of the kingdom of heaven) repreſented the inhabitants of the land, whom they were to conquer, more terrible than in truth they were; reporting to one another, that the land was full of giants, and ſons of *Anak,* men of prodigious ſtature, and cities walled up to heaven. And this the wiſe man obſerves to be the perpetual excuſe of the *ſlothful*; when they have no mind to a thing, they ſay *there is a lion in the way*; that is they fancy to themſelves dangers and terrors which are not. Thus men who are averſe from religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to heaven, are apt to complain of the monſtrous and inſuperable difficulties of religion, and how hard it is for a man to mortify his luſts, and ſubdue his appetites, and govern his paſſions, and to do all thoſe things which are neceſſary to bring him to heaven. Well! it is acknowledged to be difficult, and is it not ſo to get an eſtate, and to riſe to any thing in this world? The true pains which men take about theſe things, ſhew that they are difficult; only when men have a mind to a thing, and their heart is ſet upon it, they do not ſtand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it.

Is religion difficult? And what is not ſo, that is good for any thing? Is not the law a difficult and crabbed ſtudy? Does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging to excel in any kind of knowledge, to be maſter of any art or profeſſion? In a word, is there any thing in the world worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains? And is eternal life and glory the only ſlight and inconſiderable thing, that is not worth our care and induſtry? Is it fit that ſo great a good ſhould be expoſed to the faint and idle wiſhes, to the cheap and lazy endeavours of ſlothful men? For what reaſon, Nay, with what conſcience can he bid leſs for heaven and eternal life, than men are contented to give for the things of this world; things of no value in compariſon, not worthy the toiling for, not ſure to be attained by all our endeavours; things which *periſh in the uſing*, and which when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a thouſand accidents? One fit of a fever may ſhatter our underſtandings, and confound all our knowledge, and turn us into fools and idiots; an inundation or a fire may ſweep away and devour our eſtates; a ſucceſſion of calamities may in a few hours make the richeſt and greateſt man as poor as *Job*, and ſet him upon a dunghil.

But be the difficulty what it will of attaining *the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs*, they are to be ſought at any rate; becauſe they are abſolutely neceſſary, and we miſerable and undone if we have them not. And therefore not to diſſemble in the matter, the difficulties of religion are conſiderable; but then they are much greater at firſt, and will every day abate and grow leſs, and the work by degrees will become eaſy, and turn into pleaſure and delight; a pleaſure ſo great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the ſenſual pleaſures and enjoyments of this world.

Secondly, Others pretend want of time for the minding of ſo great a work. And 'tis very true, that all perſons have not equal leiſure for this purpoſe; ſome are much more ſtraitened than others, and more taken up with the neceſſary cares of this life: But God hath put no man upon this hard neceſſity, that for want of time he ſhall be forced to neglect his body and his health, his family and eſtate to ſave his ſoul. And yet if any man were brought to this diſtreſs, it were well worth his while to ſecure his eternal ſalvation, though it were with the neglect and loſs of all other things. But thoſe who are moſt ſtraitened for time, have ſo much as is abſolutely neceſſary: for there is a conſiderable part of religion which does not require time, but reſolution and care: Not to commit ſin, not to break the laws of God, not to be intemperate, *to make no proviſion for the fleſh to fulfil the luſts thereof*, does not ſpend time, but ſaves it for better purpoſes; ſo that every man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: And for the *poſitive* part of religion, whether it conſiſts in the exerciſe of our minds, or in the external acts of religion: no man is ſo diſtreſſed, but he hath time to think of heaven, and eternity; time to love God, to eſteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travelling about his worldly affairs, while his hand is upon the plough, his heart may be with God; and while he converſeth here upon earth, his thoughts and affections may be in heaven. Every man hath time to pray to God every day, for his mercy and forgiveneſs, for his grace and aſſiſtance, for his preſervation and ſupport, and to thank him heartily for all his bleſſings and benefits. And a little time ſeriouſly employed in this kind, would have the ſame acceptance with God, as the more ſolemn and longer devotions of thoſe who have more leiſure and opportunities for them. To be ſure, we have all of us time to ſerve God upon his own day, and to employ it wholly in the exerciſes of piety, and the care and conſideration of our ſouls.

But this, when all is ſaid, is the caſe but of a very few; moſt of us have no colour for this complaint; *non inopes temporis, ſed prodigi ſumus* (as *Seneca* ſays) "we are not poor, "but prodigal of our time, and laviſh it away profuſely upon folly and vanity." Our vices and luſts, our pleaſures and diverſions, conſume and divert thoſe precious hours, which ſhould be employed to theſe better purpoſes; nay, many times time oppreſſeth us, and is a burden to us, and lies upon our hands, and we know not how to get rid of it; and yet we chooſe rather to let it run waſte, than to beſtow it upon religion, and the care of our ſouls; inſomuch that I fear this will be the condition of many, that when they were at a loſs what to do with their time, and knew not how to ſpend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was beſt and moſt neceſſary; for this ſurely is the very beſt uſe that can be made of time, to prepare and provide for eternity.

Thirdly, Others pretend it will be time enough to mind theſe things hereafter. But this (as bad excuſes ſeldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretence, which ſuppoſeth ſo much time neceſſary, and more than many have to ſpare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will ſuffice for this work, and that it may be done at any time, even juſt when we are going out of this world. But this, of all other, is the ſtrangeſt interpretation of *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs firſt*, to put it off to the very laſt. This ſurely is a greater error on the other hand, to think that the buſineſs of religion is ſo quickly to be diſpatched, and that the great work of our lives can be crowded into ſo narrow a corner of it, that the time of ſickneſs and old-age, nay, the hour of death, well employed to this purpoſe, will be ſufficient. Alas! what can we then do that is good for any thing? that can in reaſon be thought either acceptable to God, or available for ourſelves? When we have not ſenſe and underſtanding enough to diſpoſe of our temporal concernments, and to make our wills, do we think we ſhall be fit to repent of the ſins and miſcarriages of our whole lives, and to make our peace with God? Every man muſt not expect to have *Saul*'s fortune, who when he was wearied with ſeeking his father's aſſes, met with a kingdom. We muſt not think when we are tired with purſuing the follies and vanities of this world, to retire into heaven, and *to ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

Our Saviour hath taken care to caution us againſt this deſperate folly, by a parable to this very purpoſe, of the *fooliſh virgins*, who having trifled away their time till the bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get *oil into their lamps* (by which we are to underſtand all thoſe good preparations and diſpoſitions which are neceſſary to qualify us for the kingdom of God) I ſay, having neglected their opportunity of getting this *oil*, while they were looking after it too late, the door was ſhut againſt them; they thought to have repaired all at laſt, by borrowing of others, and ſupplying themſelves that way.

And thus many deceive themſelves, hoping to be ſupplied out of another ſtore, when they have no grace and goodneſs of their own; out of the treaſure of the church, from the redundant merit of the ſaints, and their works of ſupererogation; of which ſome believe (I know not for what reaſon) that there is a great ſtock which the *pope* may diſpoſe of, to ſupply thoſe who have taken no care to get *oil into their lamps*. But I know not for what reaſon works of ſupererogation are ſuppoſed; *the wiſe virgins* knew not of any merit they had to ſpare, it was *the fooliſh virgins* only that entertained this ſenſeleſs conceit. I am ſure the parable inſinuates the quite contrary, that the beſt and holieſt perſons (which are repreſented by the *wiſe virgins*) have nothing to ſpare for the ſupply of others, who have been careleſs of their ſouls; *the fooliſh ſaid unto the wiſe, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out; but the wiſe anſwered, ſaying, not ſo, leſt there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that ſell, and buy for yourſelves.* It ſeems they had no works of ſupererogation that they knew of, but they do ironically ſend them to a market that was ſet up ſomewhere, and where theſe things were pretended to be ſold; but how they ſped the concluſion of the parable tells us, that whilſt they were running about in great haſte to make this purchaſe of the merits and good works of others, *the bridegroom came*, and the wiſe virgins that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the reſt were ſhut out.

And there are thoſe likewiſe among ourſelves, who having been careleſs to qualify themſelves for *the kingdom of God*, hope to be ſupplied out of the infinite treaſure of Chriſt's merits: But this alſo is a vain hope. For though there be merit enough in the death and ſufferings of Chriſt to ſave all mankind, yet no man can lay claim thereto, who does not perform the conditions of the Goſpel.

Others think by ſending for the miniſter, when the phyſician hath given them over, to receive in a few hours ſuch advice and direction, as will do their buſineſs as effectually, as if they had minded religion all their lives long; and that a few devout prayers ſaid over them when they are juſt embarking for another world, will, like a magical wind, immediately waft them over into the regions of bliſs and immortality.

But let us not deceive ourſelves; we may defer the buſineſs ſo long, till we ſhall get nothing by our late application to God, and crying to him, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, but that ſevere anſwer, *Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know ye not whence ye are.* If we would not have *this* our doom, let us *firſt ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, that ſo *having our fruit unto holineſs, our end may be everlaſting life.*

SERMON XLII.

The Wiſdom of Religion.

Psal. cxix. 96.

I have ſeen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

THIS *Pſalm* ſeems to have a great deal more of poetical number and ſkill in it, than at this diſtance from the time and age in which it was written, we can eaſily underſtand; the main ſcope and deſign of it is very plain and obvious; namely, to magnify the law of God, and the obſervation of its precepts, as that wherein true religion doth mainly conſiſt. And indeed, if we attentively read and conſider it, every part of this *Pſalm* does with great variety of expreſſion, and yet very little difference of the ſenſe, deſcant upon the ſame ground, *viz.* the excellency and perfection of the law of God. And the words of the *text* ſeem to be as full and comprehenſive of the ſenſe and deſign of the whole *Pſalm*, as any one ſentence in it; *I have ſeen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

Theſe words are variouſly rendered, and underſtood by interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conſpire and agree in the ſame ſenſe. The *Chaldee* paraphraſe renders the words thus, *I have ſeen an end of all things, about which I have employed my care; but thy commandment is very large.* The *Syriac* verſion thus, *I have ſeen an end of all regions and countries* (that is, I have found the compaſs of this habitable world to be finite and limited) *but thy commandment is of a vaſt extent.* Others explain it thus, *I have ſeen an end of all perfection*, that is, of all the things of this world, which men value and eſteem at ſo high a rate; of all worldly wiſdom and knowledge, of wealth, and honour, and greatneſs, which do all periſh and paſs away; *but thy law is eternal, and ſtill abideth the ſame*; or, as the ſcripture elſewhere expreſſeth it, *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

Thy law; that is, the rule of our duty natural and revealed; or, in a word, religion, which conſiſts in the knowledge and practice of the laws of God, is of greater perfection, than all other things which are ſo highly valued in this world; for the perfection of it is infinite, and of a vaſt influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole man, to the happineſs of body and ſoul; to our whole duration both in this world, and the next; of this life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we conſider the *reaſonableneſs* and the *wiſdom of religion*, which conſiſts in the knowledge of God, and the keeping of his laws.

Firſt, The *reaſonableneſs of religion*, which is able to give a very good account of itſelf, becauſe it ſettles the mind of man upon a firm baſis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty; whereas atheiſm and infidelity wants a ſtable foundation, it centers no where but in the denial of God and religion, and yet ſubſtitutes no principle, no tenable and conſtituent ſcheme of things in the place of them; its whole buſineſs is to unravel all things, to unſettle the mind of man, and to ſhake all the common notions and received principles of mankind; it bends its whole force to pull down and to deſtroy, but lays no foundation to build any thing upon, in the ſtead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great abſurdity which *Ariſtotle* (who was always thought a great maſter of reaſon) does every where decry, as a principle unworthy of a philoſopher; namely, a progreſs of cauſes *in infinitum*, and without end; that this was the cauſe of that, and a third thing of that, and ſo on without end, which amounts to juſt nothing; and finally reſolves an infinite number of effects into no firſt cauſe; than which nothing can be more unskilful and bungling, and leſs worthy of a philoſopher. But this I do not intend at preſent to inſiſt upon, having treated largely on the ſame ſubject upon another * occaſion. I ſhall therefore proceed in the

* Vide *Serm.* I. *of the firſt* Vol. *publiſhed by the Author.*

Second place, to conſider *the wiſdom of religion*. *The fear of the Lord is wiſdom*, ſo ſaith the *Pſalmiſt*; it is true wiſdom indeed, it is *the beginning of wiſdom, caput ſapientiæ*, the top and perfection of all wiſdom. Here true wiſdom begins, and upon this foundation it is raiſed and carried on to perfection; and I ſhall in my following diſcourſe endeavour to make out theſe *two* things,

Firſt, That true wiſdom begins and is founded in religion, in the fear of God, and in the keeping of his commandments.

Secondly, That this is the perfection of wiſdom; there is no wiſdom without this, nor beyond it.

Firſt, True wiſdom begins and is founded in religion, and the fear of God, and regard to his laws. This is the firſt principle of wiſdom, and the foundation upon which the whole deſign of our happineſs is to be built. This is in the firſt place to be ſuppoſed, and to be taken into conſideration in all the deſigns and actions of men: this is to govern our whole life, and to have a main influence upon all the affairs and concernments of it. As the firſt principle of human ſociety, and that which is to run through the whole frame of it, is the publick good; this was always to be taken into conſideration, and to give law to all laws and conſtitutions about it: ſo religion is the firſt principle of human wiſdom, by which all our actions are to be conducted and governed; and all wiſdom, which does not begin here, and lay religion for its foundation, is prepoſterous, and begins at the wrong end; and is juſt as if in the forming of human ſociety, every one in the ſettlement of the conſtitution, and the framing of laws, ſhould have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the publick good, which is the great end of ſociety, and the rule and meaſure of government and laws, and in the laſt iſſue and reſult of things, the only way to procure the ſettled welfare, and to ſecure the laſting intereſts of particular perſons, ſo far as that is conſiſtent with the publick good. And it would be a very prepoſterous policy to go about to found human ſociety upon any other terms, and would certainly end in miſchief and confuſion.

And ſuch is all the wiſdom of men, in relation to their true happineſs, which does not begin with religion, and lay its foundation there: which does not take into conſideration God and his providence, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments after this life. All wiſdom which does not proceed upon a ſuppoſition of the truth and reality of theſe principles, will certainly end in ſhame and diſappointment, in miſery and ruin; becauſe it builds a houſe upon the ſand, which when it comes to be tried by ſtreſs of weather, and aſſaulted by violent ſtorms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this error every man commits, who purſues happineſs by following his own inclination, and gratifying his irregular deſires, without any conſideration of God, and of the reſtraint which his laws have laid upon us, not for his own pleaſure, but for our good. For when all things are duly conſidered, and all accounts caſt up, it will appear upon a juſt calculation of things, that all the reſtraints which the laws of God lay upon men, are highly reaſonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any true pleaſure or happineſs; but are wiſe and merciful proviſions of heaven, to prevent our harm and miſchief; ſo that we are not wiſe, if we act without regard to God, and his laws, and are not willing to be governed by him, who loves us better than we do ourſelves, and truly deſigns our happineſs, and commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the laws of God are not arbitrary conſtitutions, and mere inſtances of ſovereign will and power; but wiſe rules and means to procure and advance our happineſs.

And in like manner, all that wiſdom which men uſe to compaſs their worldly deſigns, of riches and greatneſs, without conſideration of the providence of God, and dependence upon it for the ſucceſs of our affairs, is all perfect folly and miſtake. For though the deſign be never ſo well laid, and vigorouſly proſecuted, and no means which human wiſdom can deviſe for the attaining of our end, have been omitted by us; yet if we leave God out of the account, we forget that which is principal, and ſignifies more to the ſucceſs of any deſign, than all other things put together. For if God favours our deſigns, the moſt improbable ſhall take effect; and if he blow upon them, the moſt likely ſhall miſcarry. Whenever he pleaſeth to interpoſe to croſs the counſels and deſigns of men, *the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong; neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to all.*

So that it is great folly not to conſider the providence of God in all our deſigns and undertakings, not to implore his favour and bleſſing, without which nothing that we take in hand can proſper. That which is principal to any purpoſe, ought to be conſidered in the firſt place, nothing being to be attempted either without, or againſt it. And ſuch is the providence of God in all human affairs; it is more conſiderable to the promoting or hindering of any event, than all things in the world beſides; and therefore all policy, which ſets aſide God and his providence, is vain; becauſe *there is no wiſdom, nor underſtanding, nor counſel againſt the Lord.*

So likewiſe all that wiſdom which only conſiders and regards this ſhort life, and the narrow concernments of it, and makes proviſion only for our welfare in this world; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of temporal advantages, and terrified only with the danger of temporal evils and ſufferings; but hath no ſenſe of an immortal ſpirit within us, no proſpect of a life after death, no conſideration of a happy or miſerable eternity, of rewards and puniſhments, infinitely greater than all the temptations and terrors of time and ſenſe; I ſay, all this is a prepoſterous and pernicious wiſdom, and proceeds upon a falſe ſuppoſition, and a quite contrary ſcheme of things to what really is; and conſequently our whole life, and all the deſigns and actions of it, do run upon a perpetual miſtake, and a falſe ſtating of our own caſe; and whatever we do purſuant to this miſtake is fooliſh and hurtful, and ſo far from conducing to our true intereſt, that it is all either beſides it, or contrary to it: becauſe we act upon a ſuppoſal only of this life, and a being only in this world, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus groſly miſtaken, we ſet our hearts only upon temporal things, and ſtudy our preſent ſecurity and ſatisfaction, and in all our counſels and actions are ſwayed only by the conſideration of temporal good and evil, of the preſent eaſe and pleaſure, the diſturbance and pain of our fleſhly and ſenſual parts; without any ſenſe of our own immortality, and of that everlaſting ſtate which remains for us in another world.

But there is (my brethren) moſt certainly, there is another life after this; we are not *beaſts*, if we do not make ourſelves ſo; and if we die, we ſhall not die like them, neither ſhall our laſt end be like theirs. For whatever we may think or wiſh, it ſhall not be in our power to extinguiſh our own beings when we have a mind to be rid of them, and to chooſe whether or no we ſhall live for ever.

And if this be a falſe ſcheme of things which we have framed to ourſelves, and proceed upon (as undoubtedly it is) then our whole life is one great error, and a perpetual miſtake, and we are quite wrong in all that we deſign to do. Our wiſdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a falſe calculation and account of things, and have put our caſe otherwiſe than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this miſtake, our miſcarriage will be ſo much the more fatal in the iſſue. But if our wiſdom begin at the right end, and our caſe be truly ſtated, that God hath put into theſe frail and mortal bodies of ours, immortal ſpirits that ſhall live for ever; and hath ſent us into this world to ſojourn here for a little while, and to be diſciplined and trained up for eternity; and that after a ſhort proof and trial of our obedience, we ſhall be tranſlated into an everlaſting ſtate of unſpeakable happineſs or miſery, according as we have demeaned ourſelves in this world; if we believe this to be truly our caſe, our intereſt is then plainly before us, and we ſee where our happineſs lies, and what remains for us to do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to ſuffer, if we do it not.

Now this foundation being laid, it is evident, that the beſt thing we can do for ourſelves, is to provide for our future ſtate, and to ſecure the everlaſting happineſs of another life. And the beſt way to do that, is to live in obedience to thoſe laws which our maker and our ſovereign hath preſcribed to us; and according to which he will one day ſentence us to eternal rewards or puniſhments.

It is evident likewiſe, that all our ſenſual appetites and deſires are to be bounded by the rules of reaſon and virtue, which are the laws of God; and that no preſent eaſe and pleaſure, trouble and ſuffering, are to be conſidered and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are eternal; and that ſin is of all other the greateſt evil, and moſt miſchievous to our main intereſt, and therefore with all poſſible care to be avoided; and that the favour of God is to be ſought, and the ſalvation of our ſouls to be provided for, at any pains and expence whatſoever, and even with the hazard and loſs of our deareſt intereſts in this world, yea and of life itſelf.

And now if this matter hath been rightly ſtated, then religion and the fear of God, is the firſt principle and foundation of true wiſdom, and that which we are to conſider, and take along with us in all the deſigns and actions of our lives, and all wiſdom which does not begin here, is prepoſterous, and will prove folly in the iſſue.

Secondly, As religion is the beginning of wiſdom, ſo it is the perfection of it, it is the higheſt point of wiſdom, in which we can be inſtructed, *The fear of the Lord* (ſays *Solomon*, Prov. xv. 33.) *is the inſtruction of wiſdom. A good underſtanding* (ſays *David*, Pſal. cxi. 10.) *have all they that do his commandments.* The practice of religion is the perfection of wiſdom; and he underſtands himſelf beſt, who lives moſt according to the laws of God. And this I might ſhew, by inſtancing in particular virtues, the practice whereof is much wiſer, and every way more for our intereſt, than the contrary vices; but this is too large an argument to engage in, and therefore I ſhall content myſelf at preſent, briefly to ſhew, that the chief characters and properties of wiſdom do all meet in religion, and agree to it.

The firſt point of wiſdom is to underſtand our true intereſt, and to be right in our main end; and in this, religion will beſt inſtruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main end, and true to the intereſt of it, we cannot miſcarry: But if a man miſtake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole life is vanity and folly.

Another property of wiſdom is to be ſteddy and vigorous in the proſecution of our main end; to oblige us hereto, religion gives us the moſt powerful arguments, the glorious happineſs, and the diſmal miſery of another world.

The next point of wiſdom is, to make all things ſtoop and become ſubſervient to our main end. And wherever religion bears ſway, it will make all other things ſubordinate to the ſalvation of our ſouls, and the intereſts of our everlaſting happineſs; as the men of this world make every thing to ſubmit and give way to their covetous, and ambitious, and ſenſual deſigns.

Another part of wiſdom is to conſider the future, and to look to the laſt end and iſſue of things. It is a common folly among men, to be ſo intent upon the preſent, as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men deſign and labour for this preſent life, and their ſhort continuance here in this world, without taking into ſerious conſideration their main duration, and their eternal abode in another world. But religion gives us a clear proſpect of a life after death, and overlooks time, and makes eternity always preſent to us, and minds us of making timely proviſion and preparation for it. It takes into conſideration our whole duration, and inſpires us with wiſdom, to look to the end of things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is preſent.

It is likewiſe a great property of wiſdom, to ſecure the main chance, and to run no hazard in *that*. And this religion directs us to take care of, becauſe the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another mark of wiſdom is, to lay hold of opportunities, thoſe eſpecially, which, when they are once paſt, will never return again. There are ſome ſeaſons wherein great things may be done, which if they be let ſlip, are never to be retrieved. A wiſe man will lay hold of theſe, and improve them: and religion inculcates this principle of wiſdom upon us, that this life is the opportunity of doing great things for ourſelves, and of making ourſelves for ever; this very day and hour may, for ought we know, be the laſt and only opportunity of repentance, and making our peace with God: therefore *to day, whilſt it is called to day*, let us ſet about this neceſſary work, *leſt any of us be hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*; to-morrow it may be too late to begin it, and the juſtice of God may cut us off whilſt we are wilfully delaying it; and the opportunities of ſaving our immortal ſouls, may vaniſh, and be for ever hid from our eyes.

The next property of wiſdom, is to foreſee dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. *The prudent man* (ſaith *Solomon*) *foreſeeth the evil, and hideth himſelf*; that is, ſhelters and ſecures himſelf againſt it; *but the ſimple paſs on and are puniſhed*; that is, the evil overtakes them, and their folly is puniſhed in their fatal ruin. Now the greateſt danger is from the greateſt power; even from *him who is able to ſave and to deſtroy*; *I will tell you* (ſays the wiſdom of God) *whom ye ſhall fear*; *fear him, who after he hath killed, can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell.*

Again, another main point of wiſdom, is to do as little as we can to be repented of, truſting rather to the wiſdom of prevention, than to that of remedy. Religion firſt teacheth men innocency, and not to offend; but in caſe we do (as *in many things we offend all*) it then directs us to repentance, as the only remedy. But this certainly is folly to ſin in hopes of repentance, that is firſt to make work for repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly ſin, but it is not certain that we ſhall repent. And if it were, yet it is great folly to lay in before hand, and to make work for trouble; *næ tu ſtultus homuncio es, qui malis veniam precari, quàm non peccare*, was a wiſe ſaying of old *Cato*; *thou art* (ſays he) *a ſilly man indeed, who chooſeſt rather to ask forgiveneſs, than not to offend.* If a man had the beſt remedy in the world, he would not make himſelf ſick to try the virtue of it, and it is a known compariſon, and a very fit one, that repentance is *tabula poſt naufragium, a plank after ſhipwreck.* But I am greatly afraid that thouſands of ſouls, who have truſted to it, have periſhed before they could get to land, with this plank in their arms.

The laſt character of wiſdom I ſhall mention is, in all things to conſult the peace and ſatisfaction of our own minds, without which nothing elſe can make us happy; and this obedience to the laws of God does naturally procure. *Great peace have they* (ſays *David*) *that love thy law, and nothing ſhall offend them. The work of righteouſneſs*, ſays the prophet, *ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs, and aſſurance for ever.* The fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments, is the beſt preſervative againſt the troubles of a guilty conſcience, and the terrifying apprehenſions of a future judgment. And this is the great wiſdom of religion, that whoſoever liveth according to the rules and precepts of it, prevents the chief cauſes of diſcontent, and lays the ſureſt foundation of a perpetual ſatisfaction of mind, a jewel of ineſtimable price which none knows but he that has it, and he that hath it, knows the value of it too well to part with it for *the pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon*, and which always prove *bitterneſs in the end*, and for the little ſweetneſs which they yielded, leave a terrible ſting behind them.

Thus I have briefly repreſented the *reaſonableneſs and wiſdom of religion.* It is of infinite perfection, and of a vaſt influence and extent, it reacheth to the whole man, the happineſs of ſoul and body; and to our whole duration, the happineſs of this world and the next; for *godlineſs* (that is, true religion and piety) *hath the promiſe of this life, and of that which is to come.*

But now where are the effects of true religion, in the full compaſs and extent of it, to be found? ſuch real effects as do in any meaſure bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their cauſe? for nothing certainly is more excellent and amiable in its definition than true religion is; but alas! how imperfect is it in the ſubject? I mean in us, who ought to ſhew forth the power and perfection of it, in the practice and actions of our lives, the beſt demonſtration of the excellent frame and temper of our minds.

What a conflict and ſtruggling do the beſt men find between their inclination and their duty? how hard to reconcile our practice and our knowledge, and to make our lives to agree with the reaſon of our minds, and the clear conviction of our conſciences? how difficult for a man in this dangerous and imperfect ſtate, to be in any meaſure either ſo wiſe or good as he ought? how rare is it for a man to be good-natured, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, without being often betrayed into ſome weakneſs and ſinful compliances, eſpecially in the bad company of our betters? how next to impoſſible is it to be ſtrict and ſevere in our lives, without being ſour? to govern our lives with that perpetual caution, and to maintain that evenneſs of temper, as not to be ſometimes peeviſh and paſſionate? and when we are ſo, not to be apt to ſay with *Jonah, we do well to be angry?*

There are *two* precepts in the New Teſtament, that ſeem to me to be the niceſt of all other, and hardeſt to be put in practice. One is that of our bleſſed Saviour, *be wiſe as ſerpents, and innocent as doves.* How hard is it to hit upon the juſt temper of wiſdom and innocency; to be wiſe, and hurt no body; to be innocent, without being ſilly? The other is, that of the Apoſtle, *be angry and ſin not*. How difficult is this, never to be angry but upon juſt cauſe? and when the cauſe of our anger is juſt, not to be tranſported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it; this is ſo very nice a matter, that one would be almoſt tempted to think that this were in effect a prohibition of anger in any caſe; *be ye angry, and ſin not*; be ye ſo, if ye can without ſin. I believe whoſoever obſerves it, will find that it is as eaſy to ſuppreſs this paſſion at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind, or other. But to proceed,

How hard a matter is it, to be much in company, and free in converſation, and not to be infected by it? to live in the midſt of a wicked world, and yet to keep ourſelves free from the vices of it? to be temperate in the uſe of things pleaſing, ſo as neither to injure our health, nor to loſe the uſe of our reaſon, nor to offend againſt conſcience? to faſt often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining as it were with God for ſome greater liberties in another kind; and without cenſuring thoſe who do not tie up themſelves to our ſtrict rules either of piety or abſtinence? when perhaps they have neither the ſame opportunities of doing it, nor the ſame reaſon to do it that we have; nay, perhaps have a much better reaſon for not doing juſt as we do: for no man is to preſcribe to others his own private method, either of faſting, or of devotion, as if he were the *rule*, and his example a kind of *proclamation*, enjoining all his neighbours the ſame days of faſting and prayer which he himſelf, for reaſons beſt known to himſelf, thinks fit to obſerve.

And then how hard is it to be chearful without being vain? and grave and ſerious without being moroſe? to be uſeful and inſtructive to others in our converſation and diſcourſe, without aſſuming too much authority to ourſelves? which is not the beſt and moſt effectual way of doing good to others; there being ſomething in the nature of man, which had rather take a hint and intimation from another, to adviſe himſelf, and would rather chooſe to imitate the ſilent good example which they ſee in another, than to have either his advice or his example impoſed upon them.

How difficult is it to have a mind equal to every condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be patient in adverſity, and humble in proſperity, and meek upon ſudden and violent provocations? to keep our paſſions free from getting head of our reaſon, and our zeal from out-running our knowledge? to have a will perfectly ſubmitted and reſigned to the will of God, even when it lies croſs and thwart to ours, ſo that whatever pleaſes God, ſhould pleaſe us? to be reſolute, when our duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even to believe that to be our duty (though it certainly be ſo) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preſerve our lives, and yet upon a great occaſion, and whenever God calls for them, to be content to lay them down?

To be *wiſe* and *innocent*; *men in underſtanding*, and yet *in malice children*? to have many great virtues, and not to want that which gives the great luſtre to them all, I mean real and unaffected *modeſty* and *humility*? In ſhort,

How difficult is it, *to have regard to all God's commandments*, and *to hate every evil and falſe way*? to have our duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put into practice upon every proper occaſion? to have God, and the conſideration of another world always before us, preſent to our minds, and operative upon our practice? to live as thoſe that know they muſt die, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and everlaſting concernments of our immortal ſouls?

Theſe are great things indeed, eaſy to be talked of, but hard to be done; nay, not to be done at all, without frequent and fervent prayer to God, and the continual aids and ſupplies of his grace; not without an earneſt endeavour on our parts, a vigorous reſiſtance of temptations, and many a ſore conflict with our own perverſe wills and ſenſual inclinations; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulneſs over our lives, and our unruly appetites and paſſions.

Little do unexperienced men, and thoſe who have taken no great pains with themſelves, imagine what thought and conſideration, what care and attention, what reſolution and firmneſs of mind, what diligence and *patient continuance in well-doing*, are requiſite to make a truly good man; ſuch a one as St *Paul* deſcribes, that is, *perfect and entire, and wanting nothing*; that *follows God fully*, and fulfils every part of his duty, *having a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards man*. Who is there among us, that is either wiſe enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and ſatisfaction

faction of his own mind; that is ſo happy as to know his duty, and to do it; as to have both the underſtanding and the will to do in all things as he ought?

After our beſt care, and all our pains and endeavours, the moſt of us will ſtill find a great many defects in our lives, and cannot but diſcern great and manifold imperfections in our very beſt duties and ſervices; inſomuch that we ſhall be forced to make the ſame acknowledgment concerning them, which *Solomon* does concerning the imperfection of all things under the ſun; *that which is crooked cannot be made ſtraight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.* And when all is done, we have all of us reaſon to *ſay*, not only that *we are unprofitable ſervants, having done nothing but what was our duty to do*; but have cauſe likewiſe, with great ſhame and confuſion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many reſpects *wicked and ſlothful ſervants*, and ſo very far from having done what was *our duty to do*, that the greateſt part of the good which the moſt of us have done, is the leaſt part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

The practice of religion, in all the parts and inſtances of our duty, is work more than enough for the beſt and greateſt mind, for the longeſt and beſt ordered life, *the commandment of God is exceeding broad*; and an obedience in any good meaſure equal to the extent of it, extremely difficult. And after all, as the man in the Goſpel ſaid *with tears* to our Saviour, concerning the weakneſs of his own faith, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*, Mark ix. 24. So the beſt of men may ſay, and ſay it with *tears* too, concerning every grace and virtue wherein they excel moſt, “Lord, I aſpire, I endeavour after it, be thou pleaſed to aſſiſt my weakneſs, and to help me by thy grace continually to do better.”

The ſum of all is this, If we be careful to do our beſt, and make it the conſtant and ſincere endeavour of our lives to pleaſe God, and to keep his commandments, we ſhall be accepted of him: for God values this more than *whole burnt-offerings and ſacrifices*, more than *thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil*; becauſe this is an eſſential part of religion, *To love God with all our hearts, and minds, and ſtrength, and to love our neighbours as ourſelves.* The duties comprehended in theſe two *great commandments*, ſincerely practiſed by us (though with a great deal of imperfection) will certainly be acceptable in the ſight of God, in and through the merits and mediation of *Jeſus Chriſt the righteous. Bleſſed are they* (ſaith St. *John* very plainly, in the concluſion of that obſcure book of his Revelation) *Bleſſed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life*, Rev. xxii. 14.

I ſpeak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the world, and command all the pleaſures and enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand, when we ſhall *ſee an end of all perfection*, and of all that is deſirable upon earth, and upon which men are apt to value themſelves ſo much in this world; and then nothing but religion, and the conſcience of having done our duty to God and man, will ſtand us in ſtead, and yield true comfort to us. When we are going to leave the world, how ſhall we then wiſh that we had made religion the great buſineſs of our lives; and in the day of God's grace and mercy, had exerciſed repentance, and made our peace with God, and prepared ourſelves for another world; that after our departure hence, we might be admitted into *the preſence of God, where is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore?*

Let no man therefore, of what rank or condition ſoever he be in this world, think himſelf too great to be good, and too wiſe to be religious, and to take care of his immortal ſoul, and his everlaſting happineſs in another world; ſince nothing but this will approve itſelf to be *true wiſdom* at the laſt. All other things will have an end with this life; but religion and the fear of God is of a vaſt extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration, and after the courſe of this life is ended, will put us into the ſecure poſſeſſion of a happineſs which ſhall never have an end.

I will conclude this whole diſcourſe with thoſe words of our bleſſed Saviour, *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them. Which thou, who art the eternal ſpring of truth and goodneſs, grant that we may all know and do in this our day, for thy mercies ſake in Jeſus Chriſt; to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever.* Amen.

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

SERMON XLIII.

The Nature and Influence of the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

2 PETER i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

THE connection of theſe words with the former is ſomewhat obſcure, but it ſeems to be this. The Apoſtle had in the verſe before ſaid, *that the divine power of Chriſt hath by the knowledge of the Goſpel given us all things that pertain to life and godlineſs*; that is by the knowledge of the *Goſpel* we are furniſhed with all advantages which conduce to make men happy in the next life, and religious in this; and then it follows, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes. Whereby*; this ſeems to refer to the whole of the foregoing verſe; as if it had been ſaid, " Chriſt by the Goſpel hath given to us all things that conduce to " our future happineſs; and in order thereto, all things which tend to make men holy " and good." Or elſe *life and godlineſs* are, by a *Hebraiſm* frequent in the New Teſtament, put for *a godly life*. And then among all thoſe things which conduce to a godly life, the Apoſtle inſtanceth in the *promiſes* of the Goſpel, which do ſo directly tend to make men *partakers of a divine nature.*

In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider the promiſes here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes.*

Secondly, The influence which theſe promiſes ought to have upon us; *that by theſe ye might be made partakers of a divine nature.*

Firſt, We will conſider the promiſes, which are here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes.* And becauſe the chief promiſes of the Goſpel are here intended, I ſhall take occaſion from this text to handle the doctrine of the promiſes, which is frequently diſcourſed of in divinity, but not always ſo clearly ſtated. And to this purpoſe, it will be proper to take into conſideration theſe *four* things.

I. What the promiſes are which are here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us promiſes.*

II. Why they are ſaid to be ſo great and precious; *exceeding great and precious promiſes.*

III. We will conſider the tenor of theſe promiſes.

IV. When men are ſaid to have a right to them, ſo as they might apply them to themſelves. Theſe *four* heads will comprehend what I have to ſay upon this argument.

I. What the promiſes are which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of; *whereby are given unto us promiſes.* And, no doubt, the Apoſtle here intends thoſe great and excellent promiſes which Chriſt hath made to us in the Goſpel. So that to ſatisfy ourſelves in this enquiry, we need only to conſider what are the principal promiſes of the Goſpel. Now the great promiſes of the Goſpel are theſe *three.*

1. The promiſe of the free pardon and forgiveneſs of our ſins, upon our faith and repentance.

2. The promiſe of God's grace and holy Spirit to aſſiſt our obedience.

3. The promiſe of eternal life to reward it.

1. The promiſe of the pardon and forgiveneſs of our ſins, upon our faith and repentance. The Goſpel hath made full and clear promiſes to this purpoſe; that if we believe the Goſpel, and will forſake our ſins, and amend our wicked lives, all that is paſt ſhall be forgiven us, and that Chriſt died for this end, to obtain for us remiſſion of ſins in his blood. The light of nature, upon conſideration of the mercy and goodneſs of God, gave men

good hopes, that upon their repentance God would forgive their ſins, and turn away his wrath from them. But mankind was doubtful of this, and therefore they uſed expiatory ſacrifices to appeaſe the offended Deity. The *Jewiſh* religion allowed of no expiation, but for legal impurities, and involuntary tranſgreſſions, ſuch as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for *ſins of preſumption*, and ſuch as were committed *with an high hand.* If men ſinned wilfully, there was no ſacrifice appointed by the law for ſuch ſins. But the grace of the Goſpel juſtifies us from the greateſt ſins, upon our faith and ſincere repentance. So St. *Paul* tells the *Jews*, Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins: And by him all that believe are juſtified from all things, from which ye could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes.* There was no general promiſe of pardon, nor way of expiation under the law; perfect remiſſion of ſins is clearly revealed, and aſcertained to us only by the Goſpel.

2. Another great promiſe of the Goſpel is the promiſe of God's grace, and Holy Spirit to aſſiſt our obedience. Our bleſſed Saviour hath promiſed, that *our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* 'Tis true indeed, there was a peculiar promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt to the Apoſtles and Chriſtians of the firſt ages, which is not now to be expected; namely, an extraordinary and miraculous power, whereby they were qualified to publiſh the Goſpel to the world, and to give confirmation to it. But now that the chriſtian religion is propagated and ſettled in the world, the great end and uſe of theſe miraculous gifts is ceaſed: But yet the Spirit of God doth ſtill concur with the Goſpel, and work upon the minds of men, to excite and aſſiſt them to that which is good. And though this operation be very ſecret, ſo as we cannot give an account of the manner of it, yet the effects of it are very ſenſible, and this influence of God's Holy Spirit is common to all Chriſtians in all ages of the world. This propoſition is univerſally true, and in all ages and times: *If any man hath not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his.*

It muſt be acknowledged, that the Spirit doth not now work upon men in that ſudden and ſenſible manner, as it did in the firſt times of chriſtianity: becauſe then men were ſtrongly poſſeſſed with the prejudices of other religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore as more outward means of conviction were then neceſſary, ſo likewiſe a more powerful internal operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, to concur and bear down thoſe prejudices, and to ſubdue them to the obedience of faith. But now the principles of religion and goodneſs are more gradually inſtilled into the minds of men, by the gentle degrees of pious inſtruction and education; and with theſe means the Spirit of God concurs in a more human way, which is more ſuited and accommodated to our reaſon, and offers leſs violence to the nature of men. So that this promiſe of God's Holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the neceſſity and circumſtances of our preſent ſtate do require. God does not uſe ſuch extraordinary means for the producing of thoſe effects, which may be accompliſhed in a more ordinary way. The aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit is ſtill neceſſary to men, to incline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was neceſſary at firſt: Becauſe the prejudices againſt chriſtianity are not now ſo great, and many of thoſe advantages which were neceſſarily wanting at firſt, are now ſupplied in an ordinary way; and therefore it is not reaſonable now to expect the ſame extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, which we read of in the firſt beginnings of chriſtianity.

3. There is likewiſe the promiſe of eternal life to reward and crown our obedience. And this the ſcripture ſpeaks of as the great promiſe of the Goſpel, 1 *John* ii. 25. *This is the promiſe which he hath promiſed us, even eternal life.* And upon this account, the new covenant of the Goſpel is preferred before the old covenant of the law, becauſe it is *eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes.* All the ſpecial and particular promiſes of the law were of temporal good things, and theſe were the great encouragements that were given to obedience, under that imperfect diſpenſation: But now *godlineſs hath not only the promiſe of the life that now is, but of that which is to come*; as the Apoſtle tells us; 1 *Tim.* iv. 8. The Goſpel hath clearly revealed to us a happy ſtate of immortality after this life, of which men had but very obſcure and doubtful apprehenſions. So the Apoſtle tells us; 2 *Tim.* i. 10. *That it is now made manifeſt, by the appearance of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who hath aboliſhed death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the Goſpel.* Holy men had good hopes of it before; but they had no ſure, diſtinct apprehenſions of it, no ſuch full aſſurance concerning it, no ſuch clear and expreſs promiſes of it, as the Goſpel hath given us.

Thus you ſee what thoſe great promiſes are which the Goſpel hath given us, namely, the promiſe of the free pardon and forgiveneſs of our ſins, upon our faith and repentance; the promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit to aſſiſt our obedience, and the promiſe of eternal life and happineſs to reward it. Theſe are the *three* eminent promiſes of the Goſpel, and in all probability thoſe which the Apoſtle here calls *great and precious promiſes*; which brings me to the

IId Thing which I propounded to conſider, namely, why they are ſaid to be *exceeding great and precious*, τὰ μέγιϛα ϗ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, *the greateſt and the moſt valuable promiſes*. And to ſatisfy us that they are ſuch, the very conſideration of the bleſſings and benefits that they carry in them will be ſufficient: If we conſider the condition that mankind was in, when God was pleaſed to make theſe gracious declarations to us, we ſhall ſee great reaſon to ſet a high value upon every one of theſe promiſes. Mankind was extremely degenerated, *all fleſh had corrupted its ways, and the whole world was guilty before God*, and liable to all that miſery which the ſinner had reaſon to apprehend from the incenſed juſtice of the Almighty. We had forfeited that happineſs to which our immortal nature was deſigned, and, which made our conditon more ſad, we were *without ſtrength* to recover ourſelves out of it, by our repentance for what was paſt (if God would have accepted of it) and by our future obedience. Now the promiſes of the Goſpel offer relief to us in all theſe reſpects, and thereby obviate all the difficulties and diſcouragements which mankind lay under.

The gracious promiſe of pardon frees us from guilt, and ſecures us from the terrible wrath of God, which our guilty conſciences did ſo much dread; and without this promiſe, mankind would have been under the greateſt doubts and diſcouragements. For when men are afraid *their ſins are greater than will be forgiven them*, they are apt to fall into deſpair, and deſpair is an effectual bar to repentance; for when men think their condition is deſperate, they care not what they do.

And the promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to aſſiſt and enable us to do our duty, does fully anſwer all the diſcouragements and objections from our own weakneſs, and the power of temptation. We may *do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthening us*; and how weak ſoever we are of ourſelves, we are *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. If God be for us, who, or what can ſtand againſt us? The devil is a very powerful enemy, and much too ſtrong for fleſh and blood to encounter in its own ſtrength; but there is another principle in the world, which is mightier and more powerful than he, the Holy Spirit of God, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulſe and refuſe his aſſiſtance; *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*, ſays the Apoſtle, 1 *John* iv. 4. The Spirit of God dwells in all thoſe who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to aſſiſt thoſe who comply with his bleſſed motions, and do vigorouſly put forth their own endeavours.

And then the promiſe of eternal life, *that* anſwers all the difficulties of our obedience, and ſets us above any thing that the world can threaten us withal, for our conſtancy to God, and his truth. A wiſe man will be content to ſuffer any thing, or to quit any thing, upon terms of far greater advantage: And what greater conſideration can be offered to encourage our conſtancy and obedience, than an eternity of happineſs? So that the Apoſtle had reaſon to call theſe *exceeding great and valuable promiſes*; ſo valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our redemption and recovery had either been abſolutely impoſſible, or extremely difficult. I proceed to the

IIId Thing I propounded, which was to conſider the tenour of theſe promiſes; that is, whether God hath made them abſolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain terms and conditions to be performed by us. That God may (if he pleaſe) make an abſolute promiſe of any bleſſing or benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's grace does prevent many, and is beforehand with them, is as little to be doubted: the Spirit of God goes along with the Goſpel, moving and inclining men to yield obedience to it, many times before any inclination and diſpoſition thereto on their parts. But as to this promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit, the great queſtion is not about the firſt motion of it, but the continuance of this aſſiſtance, and the increaſe of it; and this, I think, may ſafely be affirmed, is promiſed only conditionally, as alſo the pardon of ſin, and eternal life. And concerning each of theſe, the matter may quickly be decided, by plain texts of ſcripture.

Concerning the promiſe of the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, the ſcripture takes notice of *two* conditions. *Firſt*, that we beg it earneſtly of God: And this our

Saviour expreſſeth by *asking*, *ſeeking*, and *knocking*, which ſignifies the importunity of our requeſts; *Our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that* thus *ask it.* And then, *ſecondly*, That we improve and make uſe of the grace which God affords us; *To him that hath, ſhall be given, and from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away even that which he ſeems to have.* That is (as appears plainly from the ſcope of the parable) to him that uſeth that grace, and thoſe advantages which God affords him, more ſhall be given; but from him that makes no uſe of them, and therefore is as if he had them not, ſhall be taken away that which he but ſeems to have, becauſe he makes no uſe of it.

Concerning the pardon of ſins; the ſcripture plainly ſuſpends that upon the general condition of repentance, and the change of our lives; *Repent, that your ſins may be forgiven you:* and upon the condition of our forgiving others; *If ye forgive men their traſpaſſes, then will your heavenly Father alſo forgive you; but if you forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will your Father forgive your treſpaſſes,* ſays our Saviour, *Matth.* vi. 14, 15.

And then the promiſe of eternal life, is every where in ſcripture ſuſpended upon the condition of faith and repentance, and perſeverance in well doing. *He that believes* (ſays our Saviour) *ſhall be ſaved*, which indeed implies the whole condition of the Goſpel. *He that believes*, that is, he that effectually aſſents to the doctrine of Chriſt, and is ſo perſuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, *ſhall be ſaved.* But if obedience were not included in the ſcripture notion of faith, yet the ſcripture elſewhere expreſly makes it the condition of our eternal ſalvation. *Heb.* v. 9. Chriſt is there ſaid to be *the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*; thereby implying that none ſhall be ſaved by Chriſt, but thoſe that obey the Goſpel. *Heb.* xii. 14. *Follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. *To them who by patient continuance in well doing ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality,* God will give *eternal life*; *but to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth* (that is, the Goſpel) *but obey unrighteouſneſs, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doeth evil.*

I cannot well imagine what can reaſonably be anſwered to ſuch plain texts; but I will tell you what is commonly anſwered; namely, That God gives the condition which he requires; and therefore tho' theſe promiſes run into a conditional form, yet in truth they are abſolute; becauſe he that makes a promiſe to another, upon a condition which he will alſo perform, doth in effect make an abſolute promiſe. As if a man promiſed another ſuch an eſtate, upon condition he pay ſuch a ſum for it, and does promiſe withal to furniſh him with that ſum, this in effect amounts to an abſolute promiſe of the eſtate.

And this is very well argued, if the caſe were thus. But God hath no where promiſed to work the condition in us, without the concurrence of our own endeavours. God may, and oftentimes doth, prevent men by his grace; but he hath no where promiſed to *give his Holy Spirit*, but to them that ask it of him. And he hath no where promiſed to continue his grace and aſſiſtance to us, unleſs we will uſe our ſincere endeavours; nay, in caſe we do not, he hath threatned to take away his grace and aſſiſtance from us. And if this be ſo, then the promiſes of the Goſpel do not only *ſeem* to be conditional, but are *really* ſo. And it is a wonder that any man ſhould doubt of this, who conſiders how frequently in the New Teſtament the Goſpel is repreſented to us under the notion of a *covenant*, ſuch a covenant in the very nature of it doth imply a mutual obligation between the parties that enter into it. But if the Goſpel contain only bleſſings which are promiſed on God's part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of thoſe bleſſings, then the Goſpel is nothing elſe but a *promiſe*, or *deed of gift*, making over certain benefits and bleſſings to us; but can in no propriety of language in the world be called a *covenant:* But if there be ſome things required on our part, in order to our being made partakers of the promiſes which God hath made to us (as the ſcripture every where tells us there is) then the promiſes are plainly *conditional.* To inſtance in the promiſe of forgiveneſs of ſins; *repent, that your ſins may be blotted out*; that is, upon this condition that ye repent of your ſins, they ſhall be forgiven; and not otherwiſe. Can there be any plainer condition in the world, than this in thoſe words of our Saviour? *If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, your heavenly father will alſo forgive your treſpaſſes; but if ye forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will your heavenly father forgive your treſpaſſes.*

This is ſo far from being any prejudice to the freeneſs of God's grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering ſuch great bleſſings to us upon any condition that we can perform; that it were one of the abſurdeſt things in the world to imagine that God ſhould grant to men forgiveneſs of ſins, and eternal life, let them behave themſelves as they will.

IV. The laſt thing I propoſed for the explaining of this doctrine of the promiſes of God, was to conſider when men may be ſaid to have a right to theſe promiſes, ſo as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themſelves: And the anſwer to this is very plain and eaſy; namely, when they find the conditions of theſe promiſes in themſelves; and not till then.

When a man hath truly repented of his ſins ſo as to forſake them, and lead a new life; and when he does from his heart forgive thoſe that have offended him, and hath laid down all animoſity againſt them, and thoughts of revenge; then hath he a right to the promiſe of pardon and forgiveneſs, and may apply to himſelf in particular what the ſcripture ſaith in general, that *God will blot out all his tranſgreſſions, and remember his iniquities no more.* When a man doth conſtantly and earneſtly implore the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make uſe of that ſtrength and aſſiſtance which God affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his grace, and further degrees of it. When a man makes it the conſtant and ſincere endeavour of his life, to pleaſe God, and *to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameleſs, and is effectually taught by the grace of God to deny ungodlineſs and wordly luſts, and to live ſoberly and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world,* then he may with comfort and joy *wait for the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*; then he may with Confidence depend upon God, *in ſure and certain hope of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed.* When he can ſay with St. *Paul, I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith,* then he may likewiſe triumph, as he did, *henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which God the righteous judge ſhall give me in that day.*

Upon theſe terms, and in theſe caſes, men may upon good grounds apply to themſelves *theſe exceeding great and precious promiſes* of the Goſpel; and ſo far as any man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the conditions which the Goſpel requires, ſo far he muſt neceſſarily queſtion his right and title to the bleſſings promiſed. And if any man think this doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I ſhall only ſay this, that men may cheat themſelves, if they pleaſe, but moſt certainly they will never find any true and ſolid comfort in any other. This is a plain and ſenſible account of a man's confidence and good hopes in the promiſes of God; but for a man to apply any promiſe to himſelf, before he finds the condition in himſelf, is not *faith,* but either *fancy* or *preſumption.*

And therefore it is a very prepoſterous courſe which many take, to adviſe and exhort men, with ſo much earneſtneſs, to apply the promiſes of God to themſelves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort men to, is to endeavour to perform the condition upon which God hath promiſed any bleſſing to us; and when men find the condition in themſelves, they will without any great perſuaſion take comfort from the promiſe, and apply it to themſelves; but till they diſcern the condition in themſelves, it is impoſſible for a man that underſtands himſelf, to apply the promiſe to himſelf; for till the condition be performed, he hath no more right to the promiſe, than if ſuch a promiſe had never been made. And 'tis ſo far from being a ſin in ſuch a man, to doubt of the benefit of ſuch a promiſe, that it is his duty to do ſo; and no man that underſtands himſelf, and the promiſes of God, can poſſibly do otherwiſe.

Therefore 'tis a vain and groundleſs trouble which perplexeth many people, that they cannot apply the promiſes of God to themſelves, whereas the true ground of their trouble ſhould be this, that they have not been careful to perform the condition of thoſe promiſes which they would apply to themſelves; the other is an endleſs trouble; let them but look to the condition, and the promiſe will apply itſelf. I ſpeak all this on purpoſe to free men from thoſe perplexities wherewith many have intangled themſelves, by falſe apprehenſions of the promiſes of God, either as if they were not made to us upon certain conditions to be performed by us, or as if any man could comfortably apply them to himſelf, before he hath performed thoſe conditions upon which God hath made ſuch promiſes. For if men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon ſuch terms as they are not to be had, they may trouble themſelves eternally, and all the world cannot help it.

I have now done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely, the promiſes which are here ſpoken of. The *ſecond* thing *(viz.)* what influence theſe promiſes ought to have upon us, *that by them we may be made partakers of the divine nature*, I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

SERMON XLIV.

The ſecond Sermon on this Text.

The Nature and Influence of the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

2 PETER i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

I Made entrance into theſe words the laſt day, in the handling whereof I propoſed to do theſe *two* things;

Firſt, To conſider the *promiſes* here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes.*

Secondly, The influence which theſe promiſes ought to have upon us; *that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.*

The *firſt* of theſe I have done with, and proceed now to the

Second, *viz.* The influence which theſe promiſes ought to have upon us; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by theſe ye might be partakers of the divine nature.* Not that we can *partake of the eſſence and nature of God*, as ſome have blaſphemouſly affirmed, pretending, in their canting and ſenſeleſs language, to be *Godded with God, and Chriſted with Chriſt.* In this ſenſe it is impoſſible for us to *partake of the divine nature*; for this would be for *men* to become *Gods*, and to be advanced to the ſtate and perfection of the Deity. But the word φύσις doth frequently in ſcripture ſignify a *temper* and *diſpoſition*; and to be *partakers of a divine nature*, is to be of *a divine temper and diſpoſition*, to have our corrupt natures rectified and purged from all ſinful luſts and irregular paſſions, and from all vicious and corrupt affections; and therefore it follows in the text, *having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt; and beſides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godlineſs, and to godlineſs brotherly-kindneſs, and to brotherly-kindneſs charity.* So that we are *made partakers of a divine nature*, as the Apoſtle here explains it, theſe *two* ways; by cleanſing ourſelves from the luſts of the fleſh, which the Apoſtle here calls the *corruption* or *defilement which is in the world through luſt*; and by a diligent endeavour after all chriſtian graces and virtues, faith and temperance, and patience, a ſincere love of the brethren, and an univerſal charity and good-will towards all men.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great promiſes of the Goſpel upon the hearts and lives of men, the Apoſtle St. *Paul* fully declares to us, 2 *Cor.* vii. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved; let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit*; that is, from the luſts of the fleſh, and of uncleanneſs, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the mind, ſuch as wrath, envy, malice, hatred, ſtrife, revenge, cruelty, pride, and the like; *perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*; that is, continually aſpiring ſtill more and more after further degrees of holineſs, and virtue, and goodneſs, which are the great perfections of the divine nature. And thus by a conſtant and ſincere endeavour *to cleanſe ourſelves from all impurity of fleſh and* ſpirit,

ſpirit, and by *practiſing all the virtues of a good life*, we ſhall by degrees raiſe and advance ourſelves to *a godlike temper and diſpoſition*, imitating in all our actions the goodneſs and mercy, and patience, and truth, and faithfulneſs of God, and all thoſe other perfections of the divine nature, which are comprehended under the term of *holineſs*. This is that which the Apoſtle here calls *partaking of a divine nature*; or, as our bleſſed Saviour expreſſeth it, *to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect*.

This the Goſpel deſigns to raiſe us to; and one of the great inſtruments whereby this is effected, are thoſe *exceeding great and precious promiſes* which I have inſiſted upon: And they are capable of effecting it theſe *two* ways:

Firſt, By way of internal efficacy and aſſiſtance; and,

Secondly, By way of external motive and argument: both theſe ways ſome or other of theſe promiſes have a mighty influence upon us (if we be not wanting to ourſelves) to raiſe us to a godlike temper and diſpoſition, that is, to the greateſt perfection of virtue and goodneſs which we are capable of in this life.

Firſt, By way of internal efficacy and aſſiſtance. And this influence the promiſe of God's Holy Spirit and of his gracious help and aſſiſtance thereof, hath upon the minds of men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the Holy Spirit is promiſed to us, in conſideration and commiſeration of that impotency and weakneſs which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved condition into which mankind is ſunk; to help us, who are *without ſtrength*, to recover ourſelves out of that evil and miſerable ſtate into which by wilful tranſgreſſion we are fallen; to *quicken us who are dead in treſpaſſes and ſins* (as the ſcripture expreſſeth the condition of unregenerate perſons) *to raiſe us to a new life*, and to cheriſh this principle of ſpiritual life, which is commonly weak at firſt, and to carry it through all diſcouragements and oppoſitions; to excite us continually to our duty, and to enable us to the moſt difficult parts of obedience, ſuch as are moſt contrary to our natural inclinations, and againſt the grain of fleſh and blood; to bear down the ſtrength of ſin and temptation; and in all our conflicts with the world, the fleſh, and the devil, and all the powers of darkneſs, to make us victorious over them; and in a word, to be a principle within us, more mighty and powerful than the luſts and inclinations of our evil hearts, than the moſt obſtinate and inveterate habits of ſin and vice, and than all the temptations and terrors of ſenſe. So that if we will make uſe of this aſſiſtance, and lay hold of this ſtrength which God affords us in the Goſpel, and (as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *be workers together with God*, we need not deſpair of victory and ſucceſs; for our ſtrength will continually increaſe, and the force and violence of our luſts will be abated, God will give us more grace, and we ſhall *walk from ſtrength to ſtrength*, and *our path will be* (as *Solomon* ſays of *the way of the righteous) as the light which ſhines more and more unto the perfect day*.

For the Holy Spirit of God conducts and manageth this great work of our ſanctification and ſalvation from firſt to laſt, by opening our hearts to let in the light of divine truth upon our minds, by repreſenting to us with advantage ſuch arguments and conſiderations as are apt to perſuade us to embrace it, and yield to it; by ſecret and gentle reprehenſions ſoftening our hard hearts, and bending our ſtiff and ſtubborn wills to a compliance with the will of God, and our duty. And this is that great work which the ſcripture calls our *regeneration* and *ſanctification*, the *turning us from darkneſs to light, and from the power of ſatan unto God*, *a new creation* and *a reſurrection from the death of ſin, to the life of holineſs*. And then by leading and directing us in the ways of holineſs and obedience; by quickening our devotion, and ſtirring up in us holy deſires and diſpoſitions of ſoul, rendring us fit to draw near to God in prayer, with a due ſenſe of our own wants and unworthineſs, and an humble confidence in the goodneſs of God, that he will grant us thoſe good things that we aſk of him; in ſupporting and comforting us in all our afflictions and ſufferings eſpecially for truth and righteouſneſs ſake; and by ſealing and confirming to us the bleſſed hopes of eternal life. Thus the Spirit of God carries on the work of our ſanctification, and makes us *partakers of a divine nature*, by way of inward efficacy and aſſiſtance.

Secondly, The promiſes of the Goſpel are apt likewiſe to have a mighty influence upon us, by way of motive and argument, to engage and encourage us to *cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God*. For,

Firſt, A full pardon and indemnity for what is paſt, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our duty, and a forcible argument to keep us to it for the future. For ſince God, who hath been ſo highly injured and affronted by us, is ſo willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchaſe for us the means of our pardon, by the grievous ſufferings of his dear Son, but to offer it ſo freely, and invite us ſo earneſtly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him; the conſideration of this ought in all reaſon, ingenuity and gratitude, to melt us into ſorrow and repentance for our ſins, and a deep ſenſe of the evil of them, and to inflame our hearts with a mighty love to God, and our bleſſed Redeemer, *who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood*; and to make us extremely unwilling, nay, moſt firmly reſolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious God, who is ſo ſlow to puniſh and ſo forward to forgive; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful, and conſtant, and chearful obedience to God's holy laws and commandments, leſt by our wilful tranſgreſſion and violation of them, we ſhould run ourſelves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our condemnation. Now that by the tender mercies of our God we are *made whole*, we ſhould be infinitely afraid *to ſin any more, leſt worſe things ſhould come to us*; leſt we relapſe into a more incurable ſtate, and bring a heavier load of guilt and miſery upon ourſelves.

Secondly, The promiſe of God's grace and Holy Spirit is likewiſe a very powerful argument and encouragement to holineſs and goodneſs, engaging us *to cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit*, that our ſouls and minds may be a fit temple for the Holy Ghoſt, which will not dwell in an impure ſoul: and likewiſe encouraging us hereto by this conſideration, that we have ſo unerring a guide to counſel and direct us, ſo powerful an aſſiſtant *to ſtrengthen* us *with all might in the inner man*, to ſtand by us in all our conflicts with ſin and ſatan, and make us (as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *more than conquerors* over all our ſpiritual enemies. For though we be weak, and our luſts ſtrong, our enemies many, and temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be diſheartened, ſo long as we know that *God is with us*, and *the grace of his Holy Spirit ſufficient for us*, againſt all the ſtrength of ſin and hell; though our duty be hard, and our ſtrength ſmall, yet we cannot fail of ſucceſs, if we be ſure that the omnipotent grace of God is always ready to ſecond our ſincere, though never ſo weak, endeavours. So that when we ſee all the enemies of our ſalvation drawn up in array againſt us, we may encourage ourſelves, as the prophet *Eliſha* did his ſervant, when he told him that *an hoſt compaſſed the city with horſes and chariots*, and ſaid, *Alas! my maſter, how ſhall we do?* And *he anſwered, fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them*; 2 *Kings* vi. 16. Or, as *Hezekiah* comforted the people, when they were afraid of the mighty force of the king of *Aſſyria*, 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8. *Be ſtrong and courageous, be not afraid nor diſmayed for the king of Aſſyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of fleſh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight for us.* This is the caſe of every chriſtian; the force that is againſt us is finite and limited; but the Almighty God is on our ſide, and fights for us; and every one of us may ſay with St. *Paul*, Phil. iv. 13. *I can do all things through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth me.*

Thirdly, The promiſe of eternal life and happineſs, if duly weighed and conſidered, hath a mighty force in it to take us off from the love and practice of ſin, and to encourage our obedience, and *patient continuance in well-doing*. The aſſurance of enjoying unſpeakable and endleſs happineſs in another world, and of eſcaping extreme and eternal miſery, is a conſideration of that weight, as one would think could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all temptations to ſin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and diſcouragements in the way of our duty. And if this make no impreſſion upon us, if heaven and hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to uſe any other arguments, which, in compariſon of this, are *but as the very ſmall duſt upon the balance*. For if on the one hand the hopes of perfect comfort, and joy, and felicity, perpetual in duration, and vaſt beyond all imagination, *ſuch as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive*: and if on the other hand, the dread of the terrible wrath of God, and of the vengeance of eternal fire, together with the inſupportable torments of a guilty *conſcience*, and the perpetual ſtings of bitter remorſe and anguiſh for the wilful folly of our wicked lives, and the rage of horrible deſpair of ever getting out of ſo miſerable a ſtate; if neither of theſe conſiderations, if both of them will not prevail upon us *to ceaſe to be evil*, and to *reſolve to be good*, that we may obtain one of theſe conditions, and may eſcape the other; there is no hope that any words that can be uſed, any arguments and conſiderations that can be offered, ſhould work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by ſuch hopes, nor to be terrified by ſuch fears, is proof againſt all the force of perſuaſion in the world.

And thus I have done with the *two* things which I propoſed to conſider from theſe words; the nature of theſe *promiſes*, and the influence they are apt, and ought to have upon us, to raiſe us to the perfection of virtue and goodneſs, which the Apoſtle here calls our being *partakers of a divine nature*. All that now remains is, to make ſome uſeful reflections upon what hath been diſcourſed upon theſe *two* heads.

Firſt of all, If we expect the bleſſings and benefits of theſe *exceeding great and precious promiſes* of the Goſpel, we muſt be careful to perform the conditions which are indiſpenſably required on our parts. It is a great miſtake, and of very pernicious conſequence to the ſouls of men, to imagine that the Goſpel, is all promiſes on God's part, and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon God for the performance of them, and to be very confident that he will make them good, though we do nothing elſe but only believe that he will do ſo. That the chriſtian religion is only a declaration of God's good-will to us, without any expectation of duty from us; this is an error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the Bible, and do attend to what they read, and find there.

The *three* great promiſes of the Goſpel all are very expreſly contained in our Saviour's firſt ſermon upon the mount. There we find the promiſe of *bleſſedneſs* often repeated; but never abſolutely made, but upon certain conditions, and plainly required on our parts; as repentance, humility, righteouſneſs, mercy, peaceableneſs, meekneſs, patience. *Forgiveneſs of ſins* is likewiſe promiſed; but only to thoſe that make a penitent acknowledgment of them, and aſk forgiveneſs for them, and are ready to grant that forgiveneſs to others, which they beg of God for themſelves. *The gift of God's Holy Spirit* is likewiſe there promiſed; but it is upon condition of our earneſt and importunate prayer to God. The Goſpel is every where full of precepts, enjoining duty and obedience on our part, as well as of promiſes on God's part, aſſuring bleſſings to us; nay, of terrible threatnings alſo if we diſobey the precepts of the Goſpel. St. *Paul* gives us the ſum of the Goſpel in very few and plain words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that ſalvation which the Goſpel offers to all men, *Tit.* ii. 11, 12, 13, 14. *The grace of God which bringeth ſalvation hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world, looking for that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good wooks.* And then he adds, *theſe things ſpeak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*; intimating, that though men were very averſe to this doctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great authority and earneſtneſs, and thoſe who oppoſed and deſpiſed it, to be ſeverely rebuked: and with great reaſon, becauſe the contrary doctrine does moſt effectually undermine and defeat the whole deſign of the chriſtian religion.

Secondly, From hence we learn, that if the promiſes of the Goſpel have not this effect upon us, to make us *partakers of a divine nature*, it is our own fault, and becauſe we are wanting to ourſelves. God is always ready to do his part, if we do not fail in ours. There is a divine power and efficacy goes along with the Goſpel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of men, where they put no bar and obſtacle to it. But if men will reſiſt the motions of God's bleſſed Spirit, and quench the light of it, and obſtinately hold out againſt the force of truth; God will withdraw his grace and Holy Spirit from them. The Goſpel would raiſe us to the perfection of all virtue and goodneſs, and the promiſes of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakneſs of human nature, and *to renew us after the image of God, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*; to take us off from ſin and vice, and to allure us to goodneſs, and to aſſiſt and encourage us in the practice of it: but if we will not comply with the gracious deſign of God in the Goſpel, and ſuffer theſe promiſes to have their due influence and efficacy upon us: we wilfully deprive ourſelves of all the bleſſings and benefits of it, *we reject the counſel of God againſt ourſelves*, and *receive the grace of God in vain*; and by rejecting and deſpiſing his promiſes, we provoke him to execute his threatnings upon us.

Thirdly and *laſtly*, If the promiſes of the chriſtian religion are apt in their own nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to ſo near a reſemblance of the divine perfections, to make us good, and juſt, and merciful, and patient, and *holy in all manner of converſation, to purge us from our iniquities*, and *to make us a peculiar and excellent people, zealous of good works*; I ſay, if this be the proper tendency of the Goſpel, and the the promiſes of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate ſtate of the chriſtian world at this day, which does ſo abound in all kind of wickedneſs and impiety; ſo that we may cry out as he did, upon reading the Goſpel; *profecto aut hoc non eſt Evangelium; aut nos non ſumus Evangelici;* "Either this is not "the Goſpel which we read, and the chriſtian religion which we profeſs; or we are "no chriſtians." We are ſo far from that pitch of goodneſs and virtue which the chriſtian religion is apt to raiſe men to, and which the Apoſtle here calls the *divine nature*, that a great part of us are degenerated into beaſts and devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy luſts, indulging ourſelves in thoſe deviliſh paſſions of malice and hatred, of ſtrife and diſcord, of revenge and cruelty, of ſedition and diſturbance of the publick peace to that degree, as if *the grace of God* had never *appeared* to us *to teach* us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all thoſe who have the face to call themſelves chriſtians, to demean themſelves at another rate, and for the honour of their religion, and the ſalvation of their own ſouls, *to have their converſation as becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt*; and by departing from the vicious practices of this preſent evil world, to do what in them lies to prevent the judgments of God which hang over us; or if they cannot do that, to *ſave themſelves from this untoward generation.*

SERMON XLV.

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

The Support of Good Men, under their Sufferings for Religion.

I PETER iv. 19.

Wherefore let them that ſuffer acording to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

THIS epiſtle was written by St. *Peter* who was the Apoſtle of the circumciſion, to the diſperſed *Jews*, who were newly converted to chriſtianity; and the deſign of it is to confirm and eſtabliſh them in the profeſſion of it; and to inſtruct them how they ought to demean themſelves towards the heathen, or gentiles, among whom they lived; and more particularly to arm and prepare them for thoſe ſufferings and perſecutions, which he fortels would ſhortly overtake them for the profeſſion of chriſtianity, that when they ſhould happen, they might not be ſurpriſed and ſtartled at them, as if ſome ſtrange and unexpected thing were come upon them; at the 12th verſe of this chapter, *beloved, think it not ſtrange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you*; that is, do not wonder and be not aſtoniſhed at it; as *if ſome ſtrange thing happened unto you.*

And then he inſtructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themſelves under thoſe trials and ſufferings, when they ſhould happen; not only with patience, which men ought to exerciſe under all kinds of ſufferings, upon what account and cauſe ſoever; but with joy and chearfulneſs conſidering the glorious example and reward of them, ver. 13. *But rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Chriſt's ſufferings; that when his glory ſhall be revealed, ye may be glad alſo with exceeding joy:* and at the 14th verſe he tells them, that beſides the encouragement of ſo great an example, and ſo glorious a reward, they ſhould be ſupported and aſſiſted in a very extraordinary manner by the Spirit of God reſting upon them in a glorious manner, as a teſtimony of the divine power and preſence with them; ver. 14. *If ye be reproached for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you*; or as it is in the beſt copies, *for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God reſteth upon you*; that is, the glorious power of the divine Spirit is preſent with you, to comfort and bear up your ſpirits under theſe ſufferings. But then he cautions them, to take great care, that their ſufferings be for a good cauſe, and a good conſcience; ver. 15. *But let none of you ſuffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer* (that is, as an offender in any kind againſt human laws, made to preſerve the peace and good order of the world) *or as a buſy body in other mens matters*; (that is, as a pragmatical perſon, that meddles out of his own ſphere, to the diſquiet and diſturbance of human ſociety:) for to ſuffer upon any of theſe accounts, would be matter of ſhame and trouble, but not of joy and comfort; but if they ſuffered upon account of the profeſſion of chriſtianity, this would be no cauſe of ſhame and reproach to them; but they ought rather to give God thanks for calling them to ſuffer in ſo good a cauſe, and upon ſo glorious an account, ver. 16. *Yet if any man ſuffer as a Chriſtian* (if that be his only crime) *let him not be aſhamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf; for the time is come, that judgment muſt begin at the houſe of God*; (that is, the wiſe and juſt providence of God, hath ſo ordered it at this time, for very good reaſons and ends, that the firſt calamities and ſufferings ſhould fall upon Chriſtians, the peculiar people and church of God, for their trial, and a teſtimony to the truth of that religion, which God was now planting in the world:) *And if it firſt begin at us* (that is, at us *Jews*, who were the ancient people of God, and have now embraced and entertained the revelation of the Goſpel) *what ſhall the end be of them, that obey not the Goſpel of Chriſt?* (That is, how much more ſeverely will God deal with the reſt of the *Jews* who have crucified the Son of God and ſtill perſiſt in their infidelity and diſobedience to the Goſpel?) *And if the righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ungodly and ſinner appear?* (That is, if good men be ſaved with ſo much difficulty, and *muſt through ſo many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God*, what will become of all ungodly and impenitent ſinners? where ſhall they appear? how ſhall they be able to ſtand in the judgment of the great day?) From the conſideration of all which, the Apoſtle makes this inference or concluſion, in the laſt verſe of this chapter, *wherefore let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

Thus you ſee the connexion and dependence of theſe words, upon the Apoſtle's foregoing diſcourſe. I ſhall explain the ſeveral expreſſions in the text, and then handle the main points contained in them.

The expreſſions to be explained are theſe: What is meant by *those that ſuffer according to the will of God*; what by *committing the keeping of our ſouls to God, as unto a faithful Creator*; and what by *well-doing*.

Firſt, What is meant by *ſuffering according to the will of God.* This may be underſtood of ſuffering in a good cauſe, ſuch as God will approve; but this is not ſo probable, becauſe this is mentioned afterwards, in the following expreſſions of *committing the keeping of our ſouls to God in well-doing*; that is, in ſuffering upon a good account: And therefore the plain and genuine ſenſe of this expreſſion ſeems to be this; that thoſe who, according to the good pleaſure of God's will, and the wiſe diſpenſation of his providence, are appointed to ſuffer for his cauſe, ſhould demean themſelves ſo and ſo: *let them that ſuffer according to the will of God*; that is, thoſe whom God thinks fit to call to ſuffering. And this agrees very well with the like expreſſion, *chap.* iii. of this epiſtle, ver. 17. *For it is better, if the will of God be ſo* (that is, if God have ſo appointed it, and think it fit) *that ye ſuffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing.*

Secondly, What is here meant by *committing the keeping of our ſouls to God, as to a faithful Creator.* That is, to depoſit our lives, and all that belongs to us, in a word, ourſelves, in the hands and cuſtody of his merciful care and providence who made us, and therefore we may be ſure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: For as we are his creatures, he is engaged to take care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Beſides that he hath promiſed to be more eſpecially concerned for good men, to ſupport them in their ſufferings for a good cauſe, and to reward them for it; *and he is faithful that hath promiſed.*

And therefore there is great reaſon and great encouragement, in all our ſufferings for God's cauſe and truth, to commit our ſouls to his care and cuſtody; our ſouls, that is (as I ſaid before) our lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, ourſelves: for ſo the word *ſoul* is frequently uſed both in the Old and New Teſtament; *Pſal.* vii. 5. *Let the enemy perſecute my ſoul, and take it:* that is, my life; for ſo it follows in the next words; *yea let him tread down my life upon the earth.* And *Pſal.* liv. 3. *Oppreſſors ſeek after my ſoul.* And *Pſal.* lix. 3. *They lie in wait for my ſoul*; that is, my life. And *Pſal.* xvi. 10. *Thou wilt not leave my ſoul in hell, my ſoul*, that is, *myſelf*; thou wilt not ſuffer me to continue in the grave, and under the power of death, but wilt raiſe me up to life again. And ſo likewiſe in the New Teſtament, *Mark* viii. 35. *Whoſoever will ſave*

ſave his life ſhall loſe it; but whoſoever ſhall loſe his life for my ſake and the Goſpel's, the ſame ſhall ſave it. The ſame word which is here rendered *life*, in the very next verſe is rendered *ſoul*: *For what ſhall it profit a man, if he ſhall gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul?* that is, his life. And ſo likewiſe, *John* xii. 25. *He that loveth his life, ſhall loſe it: and he that hateth his life in this world* (in the original the word ſignifies *ſoul*) *He that hateth his life in this world* (that is, who neglecteth and expoſeth his life in this world, for the ſake of Chriſt) *ſhall keep it unto life eternal.* And *Luke* ix. 25. that which the other Evangeliſt renders by the word *ſoul*, or *life*, he renders *himſelf*; *for what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and loſe himſelf?* and ſo here in the text, *to commit the keeping of our ſouls to God*, is to commit *ourſelves* to his care and providence.

Thirdly, What is here meant by *committing ourſelves to him in well-doing*: By *well-doing* is here meant, a fixed purpoſe and reſolution of doing our duty, notwithſtanding all hazards and ſufferings; which is called by St. *Paul*, Rom. ii. 7. *a patient continuance in well-doing.* It ſignifies ſometimes acts of goodneſs and charity; but in this epiſtle it is taken in a larger ſenſe, for conſtancy and reſolution in the doing of our duty; as *chap.* ii. 15. *For ſo is the will of God, that with well-doing* (that is, by a reſolute conſtancy in a good courſe) *ye may put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.* And *ver.* 20. *But if when ye do well, and ſuffer for it*; that is, if when ye ſuffer for well-doing, *ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* And *chap.* iii. *ver.* 6. *As long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement*; that is, are reſolute and conſtant in doing your duty, notwithſtanding all threatnings and terrors. And *ver.* 17. *For it is better, if the will of God be ſo, that ye ſuffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing*; that is, for your religion and conſtancy in ſo good a cauſe, as Chriſtians, and not as criminals upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the Apoſtle had ſaid, wherefore being forewarned of ſuffering and perſecution for the cauſe of religion, the ſum of my direction and advice upon the whole matter is this; that ſince it is the will of God that ye ſhould ſuffer upon this account, commit yourſelves, in the conſtant diſcharge of your duty, and a good conſcience, to the particular care and providence of Almighty God, as your faithful Creator.

And now I come to handle the particular points contained in the words; and they are theſe *three*.

Firſt, That when men do ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more eſpecial care of the divine providence.

Secondly, Always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our duty, and a good conſcience; for this the Apoſtle means, *by committing ourſelves to God, in well-doing.* If we ſtep out of the way of our duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God's providence will not be concerned for us, to bear us out in ſuch ſufferings.

Thirdly, I ſhall conſider what ground of comfort and encouragement the conſideration of God, as *a faithful Creator*, affords to us in all our ſufferings for a good cauſe, and a good conſcience.

Firſt, When men do ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, and God's truth, they may with confidence and good aſſurance commit themſelves (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more eſpecial care of his providence. In the handling of this, I ſhall conſider theſe *three* things.

I. When men may be ſaid to ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion; and when not.

II. How far they may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in theſe ſufferings.

III. What ground and reaſon there is to expect the more particular and eſpecial care of God's providence, in caſe of ſuch ſufferings.

I. When men may be ſaid to ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion, and God's truth; and when not. In theſe caſes,

Firſt, When men ſuffer for not renouncing the true religion, and becauſe they will not openly declare againſt it, and apoſtatize from it. But it will be ſaid, that in all theſe caſes the queſtion is, What is the true religion? To which I anſwer; that all diſcourſes of this nature, about ſuffering for religion, do ſuppoſe the truth of ſome religion or other. And among Chriſtians, the truth of the chriſtian religion is taken for granted, wherever we ſpeak of mens ſuffering perſecution for it. And the plaineſt caſe among Chriſtians, is, when they are perſecuted, becauſe they will not openly deny and renounce the chriſtian religion. And this was generally the caſe of the primitive Chriſtians; they were threatned with tortures and death, becauſe they would not renounce Jeſus Chriſt, and his religion, and give demonſtration thereof, by offering ſacrifices to the heathen Gods.

Secondly, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they are perſecuted, only for making an open profeſſion of the chriſtian religion by joining in the aſſemblies of Chriſtians for the worſhip of God; though they be not urged to deny and diſclaim it, but only to conceal and diſſemble the profeſſion of it, ſo as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting occaſions, againſt the objections of thoſe who are adverſaries of it. For to conceal the profeſſion of it, and to decline the defence of it when juſt occaſion is offered, is *to be aſhamed of it*, which our Saviour interprets to be a kind of *denial* of it, and is oppoſed to *the confeſſing of him before men*, Matth. x. 32, 33. *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him will I alſo confeſs before my Father which is in heaven: But whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in heaven.* And this by St. *Mark* is expreſſed by *being aſhamed of Chriſt*; that is, afraid and aſhamed to make an open profeſſion of him, and his religion; *Mark* viii. 38. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.*

And this likewiſe was the caſe of the primitive Chrſtians under the moderate emperors, when the perſecution of them was not ſo hot, as to drive them to a denial of Chriſt, provided they would be contented to conceal and diſſemble their religion, in that caſe they did not hunt them out, nor proſecute them to renounce their religion, if they made no diſcovery of themſelves. But yet they who ſuffered, becauſe they would not conceal their profeſſion of chriſtianity, did truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion.

Thirdly, Men do likewiſe truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer for not betraying it, by any indirect and unworthy means; ſuch as among the primitive Chriſtians was the delivering up their Bibles to the heathen, to be burnt and deſtroyed by them: For to give up that holy book, which is the great inſtrument of our religion, is in effect to give up chriſtianity itſelf, and conſent to the utter extirpation of it.

And ſuch likewiſe is the caſe of thoſe, who ſuffer in any kind for not contributing to break down the fences of religion in any nation, where the providence of God hath given it a legal eſtabliſhment and ſecurity; or, in a word, for refuſing to countenance and further any deſign, which viſibly tends to the ruin of religion: For to deſtroy religion, and to take away that which hinders the deſtruction of it, are in effect much the ſame thing.

Fourthly, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer for the maintenance and defence of any neceſſary and fundamental article of it, though they be not required to renounce the whole chriſtian religion; for what St. *Paul* ſays of the article of *the reſurrection of the dead*, is true of any other neceſſary article of the chriſtian religion, that the denial of it is a ſubverſion of the whole chriſtian faith; becauſe it tends directly to the overthrowing of chriſtianity, being a wound given to it in a vital and eſſential part. And this was the caſe of thoſe, who in any age of chriſtianity have been perſecuted by *Hereticks*, for the defence of any article of chriſtianity.

And I cannot but obſerve by the way, that after the heathen perſecutions were ceaſed, perſecution was firſt begun among the Chriſtians by *Hereticks*; and hath ſince been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad pattern, by the church of *Rome*; which, beſides a ſtanding *inquiſition* in all countries, which are entirely of that religion (a court, the like whereto, for the clancular and ſecret manner of proceeding, for the unjuſt and arbitrary rules of it, for the barbarous uſage of mens perſons, and the cruelty of its torments, to extort confeſſions from them, the ſun never ſaw erected under any government in the world, by men of any religion whatſoever) I ſay, which, beſides this court, hath by frequent *Croiſadoes* for the extirpation of hereticks, and by many bloody *maſſacres* in *France* and *Ireland*, and ſeveral other places, deſtroyed far greater numbers of Chriſtians, than all the ten heathen perſecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very day continues the ſame or greater cruelties, and a fiercer perſecution of proteſtants, if all the circumſtances of it be conſidered, than was ever yet practiſed upon them; and yet whilſt this is doing almoſt before our eyes, in one of our next neighbour nations, they have the face to complain of the cannibal laws and bloody perſecutions of the church of *England*, and the confidence to ſet up for the great patrons of liberty of conſcience, and enemies of all compulſion and force in matters of religion.

Fifthly, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of God and religion, when they ſuffer for aſſerting and maintaining the purity of the chriſtian doctrine and worſhip; and for oppoſing and not complying with thoſe groſs errors and corruptions, which ſuperſtition and ignorance had, in a long courſe of time, brought into the chriſtian religion. Upon this account many good people ſuffered in many paſt ages, for reſiſting the growing errors and corruptions of the church of *Rome*, which at firſt crept in by degrees, but at laſt broke in like a mighty flood, which carried down all before it, and threaten'd ruin and deſtruction to all that oppoſed them. Upon this account alſo, infinite numbers ſuffered among the *Waldenſes* and *Albigenſes*, in *Bohemia*, and in *England*, and in moſt other countries in this *weſtern* part of chriſtendom. And they who ſuffered upon this account, ſuffered in a good cauſe, and for the teſtimony of the truth.

Sixthly, and *laſtly*, Men do truly ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer for not diſclaiming and renouncing any clear and undoubted truth of God whatſoever; yea though it be not a fundamental point and article of religion.

And this is the caſe of thoſe many thouſands, who ever ſince the IVth council of *Lateran*, which was in the year 1215 (when *Tranſubſtantiation* was firſt defined to be an article of faith, and neceſſary to ſalvation to be believed) were perſecuted with fire and ſword, for not underſtanding thoſe words of our Saviour, *this is my body* (which are ſo eaſily capable of a reaſonable ſenſe) in the abſurd and impoſſible ſenſe of *Tranſubſtantiation*. And though this diſowning of this doctrine, be no expreſs and direct article of the chriſtian religion; yet it is a fundamental article of right reaſon and common ſenſe: becauſe the admitting of *Tranſubſtantiation*, does undermine the foundation of all certainty whatſoever, and does more immediately ſhake the very foundation of chriſtianity itſelf. Yea, though the chriſtian religion were no ways concerned in this doctrine, yet out of reverence to reaſon and truth, and a juſt animoſity and indignation at confident nonſenſe, a man of an honeſt and generous mind, would as ſoon be brought to declare or ſwear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profeſs his belief of *Tranſubſtantiation*.

And though all truths are not of equal conſequence and concernment, yet all truth is of God; and for that reaſon, though we are not obliged to make an open profeſſion of all truths at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any truth, nor to make profeſſion of a known falſhood or error: for it is merely becauſe of the intrinſical evil of the thing, that *it is impoſſible for God to lie*; and the Son of God thought it worth his coming into the world, and laying down his life, *to bear witneſs to the truth*. So he himſelf tells us, *John* xviii. 37. *To this end was I born, and for this cauſe came I into the world, that I ſhould bear witneſs to the truth.*

Thus I have ſhewn you in theſe plain inſtances (to which moſt other caſes may be reduced) when men may be ſaid to ſuffer truly for the cauſe of religion, and truth.

I ſhall mention two or three caſes wherein men may ſeem to ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, but cannot truly be ſaid to do ſo.

Firſt, When men raſhly expoſe themſelves to danger, and run upon ſufferings for the ſake of religion. Thus ſeveral of the primitive Chriſtians voluntarily expoſed themſelves when they were not called in queſtion, and in the heat of their affection and zeal for God and religion, offered themſelves to martyrdom, when none enquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of God, who knowing the ſincerity of their zeal, was pleaſed to overlook the indiſcrete forwardneſs and raſhneſs of it, might be accepted for a kind of *martyrdom*; but cannot in reaſon be juſtified, ſo as to be fit to be made a pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For though God may be pleaſed to excuſe the weakneſs of a well-meaning zeal: yet he can approve nothing but what is reaſonable.

To ſuffer chearfully for the cauſe of God and his truth, when he calls us *to fight this good fight of faith*, and *to reſiſt unto blood*; and when we are reduced to that ſtrait, that we muſt either die for God and his truth, or deny them; to ſuffer, I ſay, in this caſe with courage and patience, is one of the nobleſt of all the chriſtian virtues. But to be perfect volunteers, and to run ourſelves upon ſufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like *the ſacrifice of fools*; which though God may mercifully excuſe, and pardon the evil of the action, for the good meaning of it; yet he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-a-days to caution men againſt this raſhneſs; it is well if they have the grace and reſolution to ſuffer when it is their duty, and when they are called to it.

Secondly, Nor can men be truly ſaid to ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, when they ſuffer not for their faith, but their fancy, and for the wilful and affected error of a miſtaken conſcience. As when men ſuffer for indifferent things, which in heat and paſſion they call *ſuperſtition* and *idolatry*; and for their own falſe opinions in religion, which they miſtake for *fundamental articles* of the chriſtian faith. In this caſe, their miſtake about theſe things will not change the nature of them, nor turn their ſufferings into martyrdom; and yet many men have certainly ſuffered for their own miſtakes. For as men may be ſo far deluded, *as to think they do God good ſervice*, *when they kill his faithful ſervants*; ſo likewiſe may they be ſo far deceived, as to ſacrifice their lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable errors and miſtakes. But this is zeal without knowledge, not *the wiſdom which deſcends from above*, but that which comes from beneath, and is like the fire of hell, which is heat without light.

Thirdly and *laſtly*, Nor can men truly be ſaid to ſuffer for the cauſe of God and religion, when they ſuffer for the open profeſſion and defence of truths not neceſſary. For though a man be obliged to make an open profeſſion of all *fundamental* and *neceſſary truths*; yet he is under no ſuch obligation to make profeſſion of truths *not neceſſary* at all times; and unleſs he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace at other times, and be ſilent about them, eſpecially when the open profeſſion of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to ourſelves, and the zealous endeavour to propagate ſuch truths will be to the greater prejudice of charity, and the diſturbance of the publick peace of the church.

It was a good ſaying of *Eraſmus* (if we underſtand it as I believe he meant it, of truths not neceſſary) *adeo inviſæ ſunt mihi diſcordiæ, ut veritas etiam contentioſa diſpliceat: I am* (ſays he) *ſo perfect a hater of diſcord, that I am even diſpleaſed with truth, when it is the occaſion of contention.* As a man is never to deny truth, ſo neither is he obliged to make an open profeſſion of truths not neceſſary at all times; and if he ſuffer upon that account, he cannot juſtify it to his own prudence, nor have comfort in ſuch ſufferings; becauſe he brings them needleſly upon himſelf; and no man can have comfort, but in ſuffering for doing his duty.

And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing I propoſed to enquire into; namely, when men may be truly ſaid to ſuffer for the cauſe of religion.

I proceed now to the

IId Enquiry; namely, how far men may rely upon the providence of God to bear them out in ſuch ſufferings?

To which I anſwer; That provided we do what becomes us, and is our duty on our part, the providence of God will not be wanting on his part, to bear us out in all our ſufferings for his cauſe, one of theſe *three* ways.

Firſt, To ſecure us from that violent degree of temptation and ſuffering, which would be too ſtrong for human ſtrength and patience; Or,

Secondly, In caſe of ſuch extraordinary temptation and trial, to give us the extraordinary ſupports and comforts of his Holy Spirit; or elſe,

Thirdly, In caſe of a temporary fall and miſcarriage, to raiſe us up by repentance, and a greater reſolution and conſtancy under ſufferings. I ſhall ſpeak ſeverally to theſe.

Firſt, Either the providence of God will not be wanting to ſecure us from that violent degree of temptation and ſuffering, which would be too ſtrong for human ſtrength and patience to bear. And this is a great ſecurity to good men, againſt the fears of final miſcarriage, after all their labours, and pains, and ſufferings in a religious courſe, by being over-born at laſt by the aſſault of a very violent and powerful temptation. Not but that the beſt of men ought always to have a prudent diſtruſt of themſelves, ſo as to keep them from ſecurity; according to the Apoſtle's caution and counſel; *be not high-minded, but fear*; and *let him that ſtands, take heed leſt he fall*; becauſe till we come to heaven, we ſhall never be out of the danger and poſſibility of falling; but yet for all this, we may hope, by the ſincerity and firmneſs of our reſolution, under the uſual influences of God's grace, to *acquit ourſelves like men*, in ordinary caſes of temptation and ſuffering.

And to this end, we ſhould repreſent to ourſelves *thoſe exceeding great and precious promiſes*, which he hath made to good men, and his merciful providence, which continually watcheth over them, and ſteers their courſe for them in this world, among thoſe many rocks, which they are in danger to ſplit upon; that he is able *to ſtabliſh us in the truth*, and to keep us from falling, *to preſent us faultleſs before the preſence of his glory with exceeding joy, and to preſerve us to his heavenly kingdom*; and that if we do not forſake him, and forfeit his care and protection, he will *keep us by his mighty power through faith unto ſalvation*; either by his merciful foreſight and prevention of thoſe temptations which would probably be too hard for us; or if he thinks fit they ſhould befal us, by ſupporting us under them in an extraordinary manner.

For I doubt not, but that the beſt men do owe their ſecurity and perſeverance in goodneſs, much more to the merciful providence of God, preventing the aſſaults of violent and dangerous temptations, than to the firmneſs and conſtancy of their own reſolutions. For there are very few perſons of ſo firm and reſolute virtue, but that one time or other a temptation might aſſault them upon ſuch a diſadvantage, as would in all probability, not only ſtagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the providence of God towards good men is very remarkable, in ſecuring them from thoſe temptations which are too ſtrong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender father, who, if he be ſatisfied of the dutiful diſpoſition of his child towards him, will not try his obedience to the utmoſt, nor permit too ſtrong a temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the *Pſalmiſt* repreſents God's tender regard and conſideration of the frailty and infirmity of his children, *Pſal.* ciii. 13, 14. *Like as a father pitieth his children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him: For he knoweth our frame, he remembreth that we are but duſt*; that is, he conſidereth us as men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be ſincere, he will not ſuffer us to be ſet upon by temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our bleſſed Saviour makes it one of the petitions of that excellent prayer, which he hath recommended to us; *Lead us not into temptation*; that is, we ſhould every day beg of God, that his providence would keep us out of the way of great and dangerous temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater ſecurity to us, than any ſtrength and reſolution of our own.

Secondly, Or in caſe of ſuch violent and extraordinary temptations, the providence of God will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary ſupport and comfort of his Holy Spirit, to bear us up under them. The providence of God did take care of good men in all ages, and did afford comfort to them under great trials and ſufferings; but God never made ſo expreſs and general a promiſe of this, to all good men, as he hath done by the chriſtian religion. Never was ſo conſtant a preſence and influence of the divine Spirit vouchſafed and aſſured to men under any diſpenſation, as that of the Goſpel; wherein the Spirit of God is promiſed to all that ſincerely embrace the chriſtian religion, to reſide and dwell in them; not only to all the purpoſes of ſanctification and holineſs, but of ſupport and comfort under the heavieſt preſſures and ſufferings. For which reaſon the *Goſpel* is called *the miniſtration of the Spirit*; and is upon this account ſaid to be *more glorious* than any other revelation which God had ever made to mankind.

We are naturally apt to be very much diſheartened and caſt down at the apprehenſion of great ſufferings, from the conſideration of our own weakneſs and frailty; but the Spirit of Chriſt dwells in all true Chriſtians, and the ſame glorious power, which raiſed up Jeſus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. St. *Paul* uſeth very high expreſſions about this matter, *Eph.* i. 19. *That ye may know* (ſaith he, ſpeaking to all Chriſtians) *what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Chriſt when he raiſed him from the dead, and ſet him at his own right hand.* So that every Chriſtian is endowed with a kind of *omnipotence, being able* (as St *Paul* ſpeaks of himſelf) *to do* and to endure *all things, through Chriſt ſtrengthening him.* Of ourſelves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world are very powerful; but there is a principle reſiding in every true Chriſtian that is able to bear us up againſt the world, and the power of all its temptations. *Whatſoever is born of God* (ſaith St. *John*) *overcometh the world*; *for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The Holy Spirit of God which dwells in all true Chriſtians, is a more powerful principle of reſolution and courage, and patience, under the ſharpeſt trials and ſufferings, than the evil ſpirit which rules in the world is, to ſtir up, and ſet on, the malice and rage of the world againſt us. *Ye are of God, little children*; (he ſpeaks this to the youngeſt and weakeſt Chriſtians) *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome, becauſe greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The malice and power of the devil is very great; but the goodneſs and power of God is greater.

And therefore in caſe of extraordinary temptation, good men, by virtue of this promiſe of God's Holy Spirit, may expect to be born up and comforted in a very extraordinary and ſupernatural manner, under the greateſt tribulations and ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake.

And this was in a very ſignal and remarkable manner afforded to the primitive Chriſtians, under thoſe fierce and cruel perſecutions to which they were expoſed. And this may ſtill be expected, in like caſes of extraordinary ſufferings for the teſtimony of God's truth. *If ye be reproached* (ſaith St. *Peter* in this ivth chap. ver. 14.) *for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you.* The Spirit of God is here promiſed to ſtrengthen and ſupport all that ſuffer for the name of Chriſt, in a very conſpicuous and glorious manner, according to that prayer of St. *Paul, Col.* i. 11. that Chriſtians might be *ſtrengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience and long-ſuffering, with joyfulneſs.* For when God is pleaſed to exerciſe good men with trials more than human, and ſuch ſufferings as are beyond the common rate of human ſtrength and patience to bear, he hath engaged himſelf to endue and aſſiſt them with more than human courage and reſolution. So St. *Paul* tells the *Corinthians*, who had not then felt the utmoſt rage of perſecution, 1 *Cor.* x. 13. *No temptation or trial hath* yet *befallen you but what is common to man*; that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to human nature, and what by human ſtrength, with an ordinary aſſiſtance of God's grace, may be grappled withal. *But*, in caſe God ſhall call you to extraordinary ſufferings, *he is faithful that hath promiſed, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it*; that is, as he hath ordered and appointed ſo great a temptation or trial to befal you, ſo he will take care that it ſhall have a happy iſſue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and ſtrength equal to the violence and power of the temptation. For as *he* is ſaid *to fall into temptation*, that is conquered by it; ſo he is ſaid *to get out of it*, or *eſcape it*, who is enabled to bear it, and in ſo doing, gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the faithfulneſs of God, who hath promiſed *that we ſhall not be tried above our ſtrength*, either not above the ſtrength which we have, or not above the ſtrength which he will afford us in ſuch a caſe.

And why then ſhould we be daunted at the apprehenſion of any ſuffering whatſoever, if we be ſecured that our comfort ſhall be increaſed in proportion to our trouble, and our ſtrength in proportion to the ſharpneſs and weight of our ſufferings? or elſe,

Thirdly, In caſe of temporary falling, the providence and goodneſs of God will give them the grace and opportunity of recovering themſelves from their fall by repentance. For the providence of God may ſometimes, for wiſe ends and reaſons, ſee it fit to leave good men to their own frailty, and to faint and fall ſhamefully under ſufferings, ſo as to renounce and deny the truth; ſometimes to puniſh their vain confidence in themſelves, as in the caſe of *Peter*, who declared more reſolution, and bore it out with a greater confidence than any of the diſciples, when he ſaid to our Saviour, *though all men forſake thee, yet will not I*; and yet after this he fell more ſhamefully than any of the reſt, ſo as to deny his maſter with horrid oaths and imprecations, and *this*, though our Saviour had prayed particularly for him, *that his faith might not fail.* From which inſtance we may learn, that God doth not engage himſelf abſolutely to ſecure good men from falling, in caſe of a great temptation and trial; but if they be ſincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, though he may ſuffer them to miſcarry grievouſly for a time, to convince them of the vanity of their confidence in themſelves and their own ſtrength.

Sometimes God may ſuffer good men to fall, in order to their more glorious recovery, and the greater demonſtration and triumph of their faith and conſtancy afterwards, which was the caſe of that happy inſtrument of our reformation here in *England*, archbiſhop *Cranmer*, who after he had been ſo great a champion of the reformation, was ſo overcome with fear, upon the apprehenſion of his approaching ſufferings, as to ſubſcribe thoſe errors of the church of *Rome*, which he had ſo ſtoutly oppoſed a great part of his life: But he did not long continue in this ſtate, but by the grace of God, which had not forſaken him, was brought to repentance; and when he came to ſuffer, gave ſuch a teſtimony of it, and of his faith and conſtancy, as was more glorious, and more to the confirmation of the faith of others, than a ſimple martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the ſtake he put his right hand (with which he had ſigned the recantation) into the fire, and with an undaunted conſtancy held it there, till it was quite burnt, for a teſtimony of his true repentance for that foul miſcarriage; and when he had done, gave the reſt of his body to be burnt, which he endured with great courage and chearfulneſs to the laſt. So that he made all the amends poſſible for ſo great a fault; and the goodneſs of God, and the power of his grace was more glorified in his repentance and recovery, than if he had never fallen.

But what ſhall we ſay, when notwithſtanding theſe promiſes of extraordinary comfort and ſupport, in caſe of extraordinary ſufferings, ſo great numbers are ſeen to faint in the day of trial, and to fall off from their ſtedfaſtneſs? Of which there were many ſad inſtances, among the primitive Chriſtians, and have likewiſe been of late in our own times, and in places nearer to us. This I confeſs is a very melancholy conſideration, but yet I think is capable of a ſufficient anſwer.

And *firſt* of all, let this be eſtabliſhed for a firm and undoubted principle, *that God is faithful to his promiſe*; and therefore we ought much rather to ſuppoſe in all theſe caſes, that there is ſome default on our part, than any failure and unfaithfulneſs on God's part. Thus St. *Paul* determines in a like caſe, when the promiſe of God ſeemed not to be made good to the *Jews*, he lays the blame of it on their unbelief, but acquits God of any unfaithfulneſs in his promiſe, *Rom.* iii. 3, 4. *For what if ſome did not believe, ſhall their unbelief make the faith* (or *fidelity*) *of God without effect? God forbid: Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.* This I confeſs does not anſwer the difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and diſpoſe us to interpret what can fairly be offered for the removal of it, with all the favour that may be on God's ſide. I ſay then,

Secondly, That when good men fall in caſe of extraordinary temptation, and recover again by repentance, and give greater demonſtration afterwards of their conſtancy and reſolution, in the cauſe of God and his truth, the faithfulneſs of God in his promiſes is ſufficiently vindicated, as in the caſes I mentioned; becauſe the promiſe of God is not abſolute, that good men ſhall be preſerved from falling; but that *the temptation ſhall have a happy iſſue*, and that they ſhall not *finally* miſcarry. For promiſes of this nature are to be interpreted by us, and underſtood as we do our Saviour's prayer for *Peter* before his fall, *that his faith ſhould not fail* finally; but though he fell through too much confidence in himſelf, he ſhould through the grace of God aſſiſting him be enabled to recover by repentance.

Thirdly, The ſincerity or inſincerity of men in the profeſſion of the true religion, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, becauſe we do not ſee into mens hearts; but *he who knows the heart, and tries the ſpirits of men in a balance*, cannot be deceived in this matter; and where men are not ſincere, the promiſe of God is not concerned to hinder them from diſcovering themſelves; and the fall of ſuch perſons is no reflexion upon the faithfulneſs of God. And it is reaſonable enough to preſume, that this may be the caſe of not a few, and that (like *Simon Magus*) after they have made a very ſolemn profeſſion of chriſtianity, *their hearts may not be right in the ſight of God.*

Fourthly, If we put the caſe at the hardeſt, that ſome that were very ſincere, after they have held out a great while, under the extremity of torments, have at laſt fainted under them, and yielded to the malice and cruelty of their perſecutors, and in this amazement and diſtraction have not long after expired, without any teſtimony of their repentance: In this caſe both reaſon and charity ought to reſtrain us from paſſing any very poſitive and ſevere ſentence upon the ſtate of ſuch perſons. For what do we know, but God, whoſe goodneſs will certainly make all the allowance to human frailty that reaſon can require; (*for he knows whereof we are made; and remembers that we are but duſt*; he mercifully conſiders every man's caſe, and weighs all the circumſtances of it in an exact balance;) I ſay, who can tell, but that in ſuch a caſe as I have mentioned, God may graciouſly be pleaſed to accept ſuch a degree of conſtant ſuffering of great torments for ſo long a time, for a true *martyrdom*, and not expect a more than human patience and reſolution, where he is not pleaſed to afford more than human ſtrength and ſupport; and whether he may not look upon their failing and miſcarriage at laſt, in the ſame rank with the indeliberate actions of men in a frenzy, and beſides themſelves?

And thus God may be ſaid *with the temptation to make a way to eſcape*, or *to give a happy iſſue to it*; ſince they were *enabled to bear it*, 'till being diſtracted by their torments, their underſtandings were thrown off the hinges. and incapable of exerciſing any deliberate acts of reaſon. And without ſome ſuch equitable conſideration of the caſe of ſuch perſons, it will be very hard to reconcile ſome appearances of things with the goodneſs of God, and the faithfulneſs of his promiſe.

However, it will become us to abſtain from all uncharitableneſs and peremptory cenſure of the final eſtate of ſuch perſons, eſpecially till we ourſelves have given greater and better teſtimony of our conſtancy; and in the mean time, to leave them to the righteous and merciful ſentence of *their* maſter and *ours*, to whoſe judgment we muſt all ſtand or fall.

I am ſure it will very ill become thoſe, who by the providence of God have eſcaped thoſe ſufferings, and are at preſent out of danger themſelves, to ſit in judgment upon thoſe who are left to endure this terrible conflict, and have perhaps held out as long, or longer, than they themſelves would have done in the like circumſtances. Let us rather earneſtly beg of *the God of all grace and patience*, that he would endue us with a greater meaſure of patience and conſtancy, if he ſee fit to call us to the exerciſe of it, and (which we lawfully may, after the example of our bleſſed Saviour) *that if it be his will, he would let this cup paſs from us*, and not try us with the like ſufferings, *leſt we alſo be weary, and faint in our minds.* I come now to the

IIId And laſt enquiry which I propoſed; What ground and reaſon there is, for good men to expect the more peculiar and eſpecial care of God's providence in caſe of ſuch ſufferings.

The providence of God extends to all his creatures, according to that of the Pſalmiſt, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* But he exerciſeth a more particular providence towards mankind; and more peculiar yet towards thoſe who ſtudy to pleaſe him, by obeying his laws, and doing his will. He that is aſſured of his own heart, that he loves God, and would do or ſuffer any thing for him, can have no cauſe to doubt but that God loves him, and is concerned for his happineſs. No man was ever afraid of God, that was not conſcious to himſelf that he had offended him, and by the wilful breach of his laws had put himſelf out of the care of his providence. But on the contrary, if our hearts give us this teſtimony, that we have made it our ſincere endeavour to pleaſe him, we are naturally apt to have good aſſurance and confidence of his favour and good-will towards us. This comfort the mind of every good man is apt to give him, from his own reaſon, and the natural notions which he hath of God.

But to free us from all doubt in this matter, God himſelf hath told us ſo, and given us plentiful aſſurance of it in his word, *Pſal.* xi. 7. *The righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, his countenance doth behold the upright*; that is, he will be favourable unto them. *Pſal.* xxxiii. 18. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy. The eye of God* ſignifies *his watchful care and providence over good men.* So that beſides the ſure and well-grounded reaſonings, from the eſſential perfections of the divine nature, the mercy and goodneſs of God; *we have a more ſure word of promiſe*, in the expreſs declarations of God's word, and more particularly in the caſe of great temptations and ſufferings. For can we think, that the ſcripture ſaith in vain, *Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he ſhall ſtrengthen thine heart? Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all? The ſteps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways; though he fall, he ſhall not utterly be caſt down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand? The ſalvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, he is their help in time of trouble?* The ſame promiſes we find in the New Teſtament. *All things ſhall work together for good, to them that love God. God is faithful, who hath promiſed, that he will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to eſcape.* And to mention no more, *hold faſt the profeſſion of your faith without wavering, he is faithful that hath promiſed*; viz. to ſupport you under ſufferings, and to reward them.

Thus much for the *firſt* point, namely, that when men do ſuffer truly for the cauſe of religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves to the more peculiar care of the divine providence.

SERMON XLVI.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

The Support of Good Men, under their Sufferings for Religion.

1 PETER iv. 19.

Wherefore let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

FROM theſe words I propoſed to conſider theſe *three* points.

Firſt, That when men do ſuffer really and truly for the cauſe of religion they may with confidence commit themſelves (their lives, and all that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more eſpecial care of the divine providence.

Secondly, This we may do, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid ſufferings, nor to reſcue ourſelves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conſcience; for this is the meaning of *committing ourſelves to God in well-doing.*

Thirdly, To ſhew what ground of comfort and encouragement the conſideration of God, under the notion of *a faithful Creator*, does afford to us, under all our ſufferings for a good cauſe and a good conſcience.

The *firſt* of theſe points I have treated on at large in my former diſcourſe. I proceed now to the

Second, Namely, when in all our ſufferings for the cauſe of religion, we may with confidence and good aſſurance, commit ourſelves to the peculiar and more eſpecial care of God's providence; this is to be underſtood, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid ſufferings, nor to reſcue ourſelves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty, and a good conſcience. And this I told you was the meaning of *committing ourſelves to God in well-doing*; for if we either neglect our duty, or ſtep out of the way of it, by doing things contrary to it, the providence of God will not be concerned to bear us out in ſuch ſufferings. So that in our ſufferings for the cauſe of God and religion, *to commit ourſelves to him in well-doing*, may reaſonably comprehend in it theſe following particulars:

1. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful means of our preſervation from ſufferings, or our deliverance out of them: In this caſe men do not commit themſelves to the providence of God, but caſt themſelves out of his care and protection; they do not truſt God, but tempt him, and do as it were try whether he will ſtand by us, when we deſert ourſelves, and bring us out of trouble, when we would take no care, would uſe no endeavours to prevent it. If we will needleſly provoke trouble, and run ourſelves upon ſufferings; if we will neglect ourſelves, and the lawful means of our preſervation; if we will give up, and part with thoſe ſecurities of our religion, which the providence of God, and the laws of our country have given us; if we ourſelves will help to pull down the fence which is about us; if we will diſarm ourſelves, and by our own act expoſe ourſelves naked and open to danger and ſufferings; why ſhould we think in this caſe, that God will help us, when we would not help ourſelves by thoſe lawful ways, which the providence of God hath put into our hands?

All truſt in God, and dependence upon his providence, does imply, that we join prayer and endeavour together; faith in God, and a prudent and diligent uſe of means: If we lazily truſt the providence of God, and ſo *caſt all our care upon him*, as to take none at all ourſelves, God will take no care of us. In vain do we rely upon the wiſdom, and goodneſs, and power of God; in vain do we importune and tire heaven with our prayers, to help us againſt our enemies and perſecutors, if we ourſelves will do nothing for ourſelves: In vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our religion, againſt all the ſecret contrivances, and open aſſaults of our enemies, if we, who are united in the profeſſion of the ſame religion, and in all the eſſentials of faith and worſhip, will for ſome ſmall differences in leſſer matters, which are of no moment, in compariſon of the things wherein we are agreed: I ſay, if for ſuch ſlight matters, we will divide and fall out among ourſelves; if when the enemy is at the gates, we will ſtill purſue our heats and animoſities, and will madly keep open thoſe breaches, which were fooliſhly made at firſt; what can we expect, but that the common enemy ſhould take the advantage, and enter in at them; and whilſt we are ſo unſeaſonably and ſenſeleſly contending with one another, that they ſhould take the opportunity which we give them to deſtroy us all.

2. Provided likewiſe that we do not attempt our own preſervation or deliverance from ſuffering, by evil and unlawful means: We muſt do nothing that is contrary to our duty, and to a good conſcience; nor comply with any thing, or lend our helping hand thereto, that apparently tends to the ruin of our religion, neither to divert nor put off ſufferings for the preſent, nor to reſcue ourſelves from under them; becauſe we cannot with confidence commit ourſelves to the providence of God, but *in well-doing.*

This is an eternal rule, from whence we muſt in no caſe depart, *that men muſt do nothing contrary to the rules and precepts of religion, no not for the ſake of religion itſelf:* We muſt not break any law of God, nor diſobey the lawful commands of lawful authority, to free ourſelves from any ſufferings whatſoever; becauſe the goodneſs of no end can ſanctify evil means, and make them lawful: We muſt not *ſpeak deceitfully for God,* nor *lie,* no, not *for the truth;* nor *kill men,* though we could thereby *do God and religion the greateſt ſervice.* And though all the caſuiſts in the world ſhould teach the contrary doctrine (as they generally do in the church of *Rome*) yet I would not doubt to oppoſe to all thoſe, the ſingle authority of St. *Paul,* who expreſly condemns this principle, and brands it for a *damnable* doctrine, *that evil may be done by us, that good may come,* Rom. iii. 8. *And not as we be ſlanderouſly reported, and as ſome affirm that we ſay, let us do evil, that good may come, whoſe damnation is juſt.* St. *Paul,* it ſeems, looked upon it as a moſt deviliſh calumny, to inſinuate that the chriſtian religion gives the leaſt countenance to ſuch damnable doctrines and doings as theſe; and pronounceth *their damnation to be juſt,* who either teach any ſuch principle, as the doctrine of chriſtianity, or practiſe according to it.

Let thoſe look to it, who teach, that a right intention, and a good end, will render things which are otherwiſe evil and unlawful, not only lawful to be done by us, but in many caſes meritorious; eſpecially where the good of the church, and the extirpation of hereſy are more immediately concerned. Of this nature are the doctrines of equivocation and mental reſervation, and the lawfulneſs of ſuch artificial ways of lying, to avoid the danger of the law, when they are brought before heretical magiſtrates; and this is the common doctrine of the moſt learned caſuiſts of all orders in the church of *Rome:* And ſuch likewiſe are their doctrines, of the lawfulneſs of extirpating hereticks, by the moſt barbarous and bloody means, and of breaking faith with them, though given by emperors and princes, in the moſt publick and ſolemn manner; both which are the avowed doctrines of their general councils, and have frequently been put in practice, to the deſtruction of many millions of chriſtians, better and more righteous than themſelves. *But we have not ſo learned Chriſt, who have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jeſus.* They who are rightly inſtructed in the chriſtian religion, are ſo far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil, to bring others under ſuffering, that they do not allow it in any caſe whatſoever, no not for the cauſe of God and religion, and to free themſelves from the greateſt ſufferings that can be inflicted upon them.

3. Provided alſo, that we do truſt the providence of God, and do indeed *commit ourſelves* to it; relying upon his wiſdom and goodneſs, and entirely ſubmitting and reſigning up ourſelves to his will and diſpoſal, both as to the degree and the duration of our ſufferings; believing that he will do that for us which upon the whole matter, and in the final iſſue and reſult of things, will be beſt for us. That bleſſing, wherewith *Moſes* the man of God bleſt the people of *Iſrael* before his death, doth belong to good men in all ages: *he loveth his people,* and *all his ſaints are in his hand,* Deut. xxxiii. 3. Innumerable are the promiſes in ſcripture concerning the merciful providence and goodneſs of God, towards thoſe *who truſt in him, and hope in his mercy.* Pſal. xxxii. 10. *Many ſorrows ſhall be to the wicked: but he that truſteth in the Lord, mercy ſhall compaſs him about.* Pſal. xxxiii. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy: to deliver their ſoul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our ſoul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our ſhield. For our heart ſhall rejoice in him: becauſe we have truſted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.* Pſal. xxxiv. 22. *The Lord*

redeemeth the ſoul of his ſervants, and none of them that truſt in him ſhall be deſolate. Pſal. xxxvii. 39, 40. *But the ſalvation of the righteous is of the Lord, he is their ſtrength in the time of trouble. And the Lord ſhall help them and deliver them: he ſhall deliver them from the wicked, and ſave them becauſe they truſt in him.* Pſal. xxxi. 19. *O how great is thy goodneſs, which thou haſt laid up for them that fear thee; which thou haſt wrought for them that truſt in thee before the ſons of men.* Pſal. lv. 22. *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee: he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.* Pſal. cxxv. 1. *They that truſt in the Lord ſhall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.* Iſa. xxvi. 3, 4. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whoſe mind is ſtayed on thee, becauſe he truſteth in thee. Truſt ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earneſtly to God for his gracious help and aſſiſtance, for his merciful comfort and ſupport under ſufferings; that he would be pleaſed to ſtrengthen our faith, and to increaſe and lengthen out our patience, in proportion to the degree and duration of our ſufferings.

All the promiſes which God hath made to us are upon this condition, that we earneſtly ſeek and ſue to him for the benefit and bleſſing of them. *Pſal.* l. 15. *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou ſhalt glorify me.* Ezek. xxxvi. 37. After a great deliverance, and many bleſſings promiſed to them, this condition is at laſt added, *thus ſaith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael, to do it for them.* And this likewiſe is the tenor of the promiſes of the New Teſtament, *Matth.* vii. 7. *Aſk, and it ſhall be given you: ſeek, and ye ſhall find: knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.* And in this very caſe that I am ſpeaking of, God expects that we ſhould apply ourſelves to him for ſpiritual wiſdom and grace, to behave ourſelves under ſufferings as we ought: *Jam.* i. 2, 3, 4. Where ſpeaking of the manifold temptations that chriſtians would be exerciſed withal, he directs them to pray to God for wiſdom to demean themſelves under perſecutions, with patience, and conſtancy, and chearfulneſs. *My brethren, account it all joy, when you fall into divers temptations*; (meaning the temptations and trials of ſuffering in ſeveral kinds) *knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work.* And becauſe this is a very difficult duty, and requires a great deal of ſpiritual skill, to demean ourſelves under ſufferings as we ought, therefore he adds in the next words: *If any of you lack wiſdom, let him aſk of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it ſhall be given him.*

And this earneſt application we are to make to God, for *his grace and ſeaſonable help in time of need*; not to put him in mind of his promiſe, but to teſtify our dependence upon him, and expectation of all good from him. And we muſt likewiſe uſe great importunity in our prayers to God, to aſſiſt us and ſtand by us in the day of trial, and the hour of temptation. And therefore our Saviour heaps up ſeveral words, to denote the great earneſtneſs and importunity which we ought to uſe in prayer, bidding us to *aſk*, and *ſeek*, and *knock*. And to ſhew that he lays more than ordinary weight upon this matter, and to encourage our importunity, he ſpake two ſeveral parables to this purpoſe; the firſt, *Luke* xi. 5. of the man who by *mere importunity* prevailed with his friend to riſe at midnight to do him a kindneſs, which our Saviour applies to encourage our importunity in prayer, *ver.* 9. *And I ſay unto you, aſk, and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.* The other is the parable of the importunate widow, and unjuſt judge, related by the ſame Evangeliſt, *Luke* xviii. 1. with this preface to it; and *he ſpake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.* And to ſpeak the truth, they ſeem at firſt ſight two of the oddeſt of all our Saviour's parables, as if the deſign of them were to inſinuate to us, that God is to be prevailed upon by the *mere importunity* of our prayers to grant our requeſts: But our bleſſed Saviour, who beſt knew his own meaning, tells us, that all that he deſign'd by it, was only to ſignify, *that we ought always to pray, and not to faint*; that is, *to continue inſtant in prayer*, and not to give over after once aſking, as if we deſpaired of prevailing. Not that *mere importunity* prevails with God to give us thoſe things which he is otherwiſe unwilling to grant; but becauſe it becomes us to be fervent, and earneſt, to teſtify our faith and confidence in the goodneſs of God, and the deep ſenſe we have of our own weakneſs and wants, and unworthineſs; and likewiſe that we ſet a true value upon the bleſſings and favours of God, as worth all the earneſtneſs and importunity we can uſe:

And in this decent and ſober ſenſe, the ſucceſs of our prayers may truly be ſaid to depend upon our *importunity*; not that it is neceſſary to move God to grant our requeſts, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the grace and mercy which God is willing to confer upon us.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right notion of this matter, and that we may the more diſtinctly underſtand the true reaſon why our Saviour does require ſo much earneſtneſs and importunity of prayer on our part; not at all to work upon God, and to diſpoſe him to ſhew mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to, whenever we are fit for it) but only to diſpoſe and qualify us to receive the grace and mercy of God, with greater advantage to ourſelves.

5. Provided moreover, that we be not confident of ourſelves, and of the force and ſtrength of our own reſolution. We know not ourſelves, nor the frailty and weakneſs of our own reſolution, till we are tried. 'Tis wiſe advice which *Solomon* gives us, and never more ſeaſonable than in the day of trial, *Prov.* iii. 5, 6, 7. *Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own underſtanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths; be not wiſe in thine own eyes*; that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wiſdom and ſtrength or ability in any kind; there is a ſecret providence of God, which mingles itſelf with the actions and ſpirits of men, and diſpoſeth of us unknown to ourſelves; and what we think to be the effect of our own ſtrength and reſolution, of our own wiſdom and contrivance, proceeds from an higher cauſe, which, unſeen to us, does ſteer and govern us. So the wiſe man obſerves, *Prov.* xx. 24. *Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then underſtand his own ways?* And therefore we have reaſon every one to ſay with the prophet, *Jer.* x. 23. *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himſelf, it is not in man that walketh to direct his ſteps.* Our *feet* will ſoon *ſlip*, if *God* do not *uphold us by his hand.* Remember how ſhamefully the chief of our Lord's diſciples miſcarried, by too much confidence in himſelf, I mean St. *Peter*; in whoſe fall we may all ſee our own frailty; if God do but permit the devil to have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal of chaff found in the beſt of us. What St. *Paul* ſaid of himſelf, 2 *Cor.* xii. 10. *When I am weak, then am I ſtrong*, we ſhall all find true, when it comes to the trial; we are then ſtrongeſt, when, in a juſt ſenſe of our own weakneſs, we rely moſt upon the ſtrength and power of God.

6. Provided furthermore, that according to our ability, we have been much in the exerciſe of alms and charity. For *well-doing*, or *doing good*, is ſometimes taken in a narrower ſenſe, not improper here to be mentioned, though perhaps not ſo particularly intended here in the text, for *works of charity and alms.* As, *Heb.* xiii. 16. *But to do good, and to communicate* (that is, to the neceſſities of the poor) *forget not, for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed.* This kind of *well-doing* is a ſpecial preſervative in times of evil; there is no kind of grace or virtue to which there are in ſcripture more ſpecial promiſes made of our protection and preſervation from evil and ſuffering, of ſupport and comfort under them, and deliverance out of them, than to this of a charitable and compaſſionate conſideration of thoſe who labour under want or ſuffering. *Pſal.* xxxvii. 3. *Truſt in the Lord, and do good, ſo ſhalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed:* And ver. 19, ſpeaking of *righteous* or *merciful* men, *they ſhall not be aſhamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they ſhall be ſatisfied.* Pſal. xli. 1, 2. *Bleſſed is he that conſidereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive, and he ſhall be bleſſed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies.*

There are likewiſe in the apocryphal books excellent ſayings for the encouragement of charity, as that which will be particularly conſidered and rewarded to us in the times of danger and diſtreſs, in the days of affliction and ſuffering, *Tob.* iv. 7, 8, 9, 10. *Give alms of thy ſubſtance, and turn not thy face from any poor man, and the face of God ſhall not be turned away from thee; if thou haſt abundance, give alms accordingly; if thou haſt but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little, for thou layeſt up for thyſelf a good treaſure againſt the day of neceſſity, becauſe that alms do deliver from death, and ſuffereth not to come into darkneſs.* Ecclus. iii. 31. Speaking of him that gives alms, and is ready to do kindneſs to others; *He is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth he ſhall find a ſtay.* And chap. xxix. 11, 12, 13. *Lay up thy treaſure according to the commandment of the Moſt High, and it ſhall bring thee more profit than gold; ſhut up alms in thy ſtore-houſes, aad it ſhall deliver thee from all affliction, it ſhall fight for thee againſt thine enemies, better than a mighty ſhield, and ſtrong ſpear.*

I have often ſaid it, and am verily perſuaded of it, that one of the beſt ſigns of God's mercy and favour to this poor nation, is, that God hath been pleaſed of late years to ſtir up ſo general a diſpoſition in men to works of alms and charity, and thereby to revive the primitive ſpirit of chriſtianity, which ſo eminently *abounded in this grace*, and taught *thoſe who believed in God to be careful to maintain and practiſe good works.* And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath mercy ſtill in ſtore for us, than that men are ſo ready to ſhew mercy; there are great objects to exerciſe our charity upon in this time of the general ſuſpenſion of trade and buſineſs, from an apprehenſion of approaching troubles; by reaſon whereof, both the numbers and neceſſities of our poor are greatly and daily increaſed among us; and beſides the poor of our own nation, God has ſent us great numbers from abroad, I mean thoſe who are fled hither for ſhelter, from that violent ſtorm of perſecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the cauſe of our common religion. According to the compaſſion we ſhew to them, we may expect that God will either preſerve us from the like ſufferings, or graciouſly ſupport us under them. What do we know, but that God is now trying us, and hath purpoſely put this opportunity into our hands, of preventing, or mitigating, or ſhortening our own ſufferings, according as we extend our charity and pity to thoſe who have ſuffered ſo deeply for the cauſe of God, and his truth?

7. Provided in the laſt place, and above all, that we be ſincere in our religion, and endeavour to be univerſally good, and *holy in all manner of converſation*, and *to abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory of God.* This is the largeſt ſenſe of *well-doing*, and the moſt neceſſary of all the reſt, to prepare us for ſufferings, and to give us courage and conſtancy under them; and likewiſe to engage the providence of God to a tender care of us, and concernment for us, if he ſhall ſee it fit to bring us into a ſtate of ſuffering.

But if we live in open contempt and violation of God's laws, if we make no conſcience of our ways and actions, we cannot poſſibly have any well-grounded truſt and confidence in God, for *he hates all the workers of iniquity, and* his providence *ſets itſelf againſt them* for *evil.* Bad men draw many miſchiefs and inconveniencies upon themſelves, as the natural conſequences of their actions; but beſides this, the vengeance of God haunts and purſues evil-doers, and his juſt providence many times involves them in many difficulties and dangers, beſides and beyond the natural courſe of things: *Upon the wicked* (ſays *David) he will rain ſnares:* So that as ever we expect the comfortable effects of the divine care and providence, we muſt live in a dutiful obedience to God's holy will and laws.

Bad men may make a profeſſion of the true religion, and may in ſome ſort believe it, though they do not live according to it; and yet perhaps for all this, out of a mere generoſity and obſtinacy of mind, they cannot bear to be threatened and terrified out of the profeſſion of the truth; and will endure a great deal of trouble and inconveniences, before they will renounce it; knowing themſelves to be ſo far in the right, that they ſtand for the truth, and hoping perhaps thereby to make ſome amends for their bad practice. But when all is done, nothing gives a man true courage and reſolution, like the teſtimony of our own hearts, concerning our own ſincerity, and the conſcience of well-doing. And on the contrary, he that hath not the reſolution and patience to mortify his luſts, and to reſtrain his appetites, and to ſubdue his irregular paſſions for the ſake of God and religion, will not eaſily bring himſelf to ſubmit to great ſufferings upon that account. There is conſiderable difficulty in the practice of religion, and the reſolute courſe of a holy life; but ſurely it is much eaſier *to live* as religon requires we ſhould do, than *to lay down our lives* for it; and (as I have told you upon another occaſion) he that cannot prevail with himſelf *to live like a ſaint*, will much more hardly be perſuaded *to die a martyr.* I proceed to the

Third point, namely, what ground of comfort and encouragement the conſideration of God, under the notion of *a faithful Creator*, does afford to us under all our ſufferings for a good conſcience and a good cauſe. *Let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their ſouls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* And in this I ſhall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of comfort and encouragement to us, under all our ſufferings for God, to conſider him as the author of our beings, or as it is expreſſed in the text, *as a faithful Creator*; one that is not fickle and inconſtant in his affection and kindneſs to his creatures; but is true to his own deſign, and will not abandon and forſake the work of his own hands: So great a benefit as that of our beings, freely conferred upon us, is but an earneſt of God's further kindneſs to us, and future care of us; if by our ill carriage towards him, we do not render ourſelves unworthy and incapable of it; That we are God's creatures, is a demonſtration that he hath a kindneſs for us: if he had not, he would never have made us; as it is excellently ſaid in the *Wiſdom of Solomon*, chap. xi. 23, 24. *Thou haſt mercy upon all, for thou loveſt all the things that are, and abhorreſt nothing which thou haſt made: For never wouldſt thou have made any thing, if thou hadſt hated it.* And ver. 26. *Thou ſpareſt all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of ſouls.*

To whom then may we with ſo much confidence commit ourſelves, as to him who freely gave us our being? From whom may we expect ſo tender a regard and conſideration of our caſe, and all the circumſtances of it; as from this great founder and benefactor? For *he that made us knows our frame, and whereof we are made*, and how much we are able to bear; he conſiders our ſtrength, or rather our weakneſs, and what courage and reſolution he hath endued us withal, and what comfort and ſupport we ſtand in need of in the day of tribulation. And as they who make armour, are wont to try that which they think to be good and well-tempered with a ſtronger charge, not to break and hurt it, but to prove and praiſe it: ſo God exerciſeth thoſe whom he hath fitted and tempered for it, with manifold temptations, *that the trial of their faith*, as St. *Peter* expreſſeth it. 1 *Pet*. i. 7. *being much more precious than of gold tried in the fire, may be found unto praiſe, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt.*

So that this conſideration that we are God's creatures, does (as I may ſay) oblige him in faithfulneſs to his own act, and in conſequence of his bringing us into being at firſt, to be concerned for us afterwards, ſo as never to abandon us, nor quite to take away his loving-kindneſs and mercy from us; 'till we are good for nothing, and do in a manner ceaſe to be what he made us, that is, *reaſonable creatures*. A perſon or people muſt have proceeded to the utmoſt degree of degeneracy, when God will conſider them no longer as his creatures, nor ſhew any pity or favour to them; things muſt be come to extremity, when God deals thus with us, as he threatned the people of *Iſrael*, Iſa. xxvii. 11. *When the boughs are withered, they ſhall be broken off, and ſet on fire; for it is a people of no underſtanding: therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will ſhew them no favour.*

And now I have done with the *three* points which I propoſed to handle from this text, and the diſcourſe which I have made upon them, does all along apply itſelf, by directing us how we ought *to commit ourſelves* to the providence of God, in all caſes of danger and ſuffering, eſpecially for the cauſe of God, and his truth, *viz.* in the faithful diſcharge of our duty and a good conſcience, and by a firm truſt and confidence in the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine providence, not doubting but that *he who made us, and knows our frame*, will have a tender care of us, and *not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

And as to our preſent danger, and that terrible ſtorm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherwiſe he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earneſt in our prayers to him, not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this occaſion to do that which we ſhould have done without it, *to break off our ſins by repentance, and to turn every one of us from the evil of our ways*; that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put ourſelves under the more immediate care and protection of his providence; that we may prevent his judgments, and turn away his wrath and diſpleaſure from us, as he did once from a great and ſinful city and people, upon their ſincere humiliation and repentance, *Jonah* iii. 10. where it is ſaid of the people of *Nineveh, that God ſaw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had ſaid he would do unto them, and he did it not.* Above all, let us be ſincere in the profeſſion of our religion, and conſcientious in the practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great trials and ſufferings, like *the teſtimony of a good conſcience, void of offence towards God and towards men.*

I will conclude this whole diſcourſe with thoſe apoſtolical bleſſings and prayers, *Col.* i. 10, 11. *That ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleaſing, being fruitful in every good work, ſtrengthned with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and long-ſuffering, with joyfulneſs.* And 2 Theſſ. ii. 16, 17. *Now our Lord Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlaſting conſolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and eſtabliſh you in every good work. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.* Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XLVII.

Of the Work aſſign'd to every Man, and the Seaſon for doing it.

JOHN ix. 4.

I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day; The night cometh, when no man can work.

THESE words our bleſſed Saviour ſpake of himſelf, whilſt he was upon earth; in which he tells us, that he was ſent by God into the world, and had a certain work and employment appointed him during his abode in it. A great work indeed! to inſtruct, and reform, and ſave mankind. A work of great labour and pains, and patience, not to be done in a ſhort time; and yet the time for doing it was not long after he came into the world: it was a good while before he began it; and after he began it, the time of working was not long before the night came, and put an end to it: *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

But this which our Saviour here ſpeaks of himſelf, and which properly belongs to him, and no other; may yet be accommodated to every man, with ſome allowance for the difference and diſproportion. For tho' every man be not ſent by God into the world after ſo peculiar a manner, and upon ſo particular and vaſt a deſign: yet upon a general account, every man is ſent by God into this world, and hath a work given him to do in it, which he is concern'd vigorouſly to mind and to proſecute with all his might. And tho' every man be not ſent to ſave the whole world, as the Son of God was, yet every man is ſent by God into the world, *to work out his own ſalvation*, and to take care of that in the firſt place, and then to promote the ſalvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good ſenſe, accommodate theſe words of our Saviour to himſelf: *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

I ſhall therefore at this time take the liberty to handle theſe words according to this moral accommodation of them, and apply what our Saviour here ſays of himſelf, to every man that cometh into the world: and this I ſhall do, by ſhewing theſe *three* things.

Firſt, That every man hath a work aſſigned him to do in this world, by him that ſent him into it; and may in ſome ſenſe ſay, as our bleſſed Saviour did of himſelf, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me.*

Secondly, That there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in. *While it is day.*

Thirdly, That after this ſeaſon is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working. *The night cometh, when no man can work.*

Firſt, Every man hath a work aſſigned him to do in this world, by him that ſent him into it, and may in ſome ſenſe ſay, as our bleſſed Saviour did of himſelf, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me.* God who made man a reaſonable creature, and hath endowed him with faculties, whereby he is capable of knowing and ſerving him; hath appointed him a work and ſervice ſuitable to theſe faculties; and having infuſed an immortal ſoul into this earthly body, hath certainly deſigned him for a ſtate beyond this life;

life, in which he ſhall be for ever happy or miſerable, according as he uſeth and demeans himſelf in this world.

So that the work which every one of us hath to do in this world, is to prepare and fit ourſelves for that eternal duration which remains for us after death. For the life which we live now in this world, is a time of exerciſe, a ſhort ſtate of probation and trial, in order to a durable and endleſs ſtate, in which we ſhall be immutably fix'd in another world. This world into which we are now ſent for a little while, is as it were God's ſchool, in which immortal ſpirits clothed with fleſh, are trained and bred up for eternity: and therefore the beſt, the only ſure way to be happy for ever, is, ſo to improve the ſhort and uncertain time of this life, that we may approve ourſelves to God in this world, and enjoy him in the next: or (as St. *Paul* expreſſeth it) *that having our fruit unto holineſs, our end may be everlaſting life.*

And this work conſiſts in theſe *three* things.

I. In the care of our own ſalvation.

II. In doing what we can to promote the ſalvation of others.

III. And in order to both theſe, in the careful improvement and good husbandry of our time.

I. In the care of our own ſalvation. And this conſiſts in *two* things.

1. In the worſhip of Almighty God.

2. In the careful and conſcientious practice and obedience of his holy laws.

1. The care of our own ſalvation conſiſts in the pious and devout worſhip of Almighty God; that we honour him, and pay him that homage and reſpect, which is due from creatures to him that made them, and is the great ſovereign and judge of the world; that we have an inward reverence and eſteem of him, and that we expreſs this by all ſolemn external acknowledgments of him; as by praying to him for the ſupply of our wants; by praiſing him for all the bleſſings and benefits which we have received at his hands; and that we ſet apart conſtant and ſolemn times for the performance of theſe duties; and that when we are employed in them, we be ſerious and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of divine worſhip with thoſe circumſtances of reverence and reſpect, which may teſtify our awful ſenſe of the divine majeſty, and our inward and profound veneration of him, with whom we have to do: And this is that which is directly and properly *religion.*

2. This care of our own ſalvation does conſiſt likewiſe in the conſcientious and conſtant obedience and practice of all God's holy laws, in the conformity of our lives and actions to the laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural, or written upon our hearts, or made known to us by the revelation of his word; that we govern our paſſions by reaſon, and moderate ourſelves in the uſe of ſenſual delights, ſo as not to tranſgreſs the rules of temperance and chaſtity; that we demean ourſelves towards others, and converſe with them with juſtice and fidelity, with kindneſs and charity.

Theſe are the ſum of the divine laws, and the heads of our duty towards ourſelves and others; all which are more powerfully inforced upon us by the revelation of the goſpel, and the plain promiſes and threatnings of it; the faith of Chriſt being the moſt firm and effectual principle both of piety towards God, and of univerſal obedience to all his particular commands.

And this is the great work which God hath ſent us to do in the world. So the wiſe man ſums up our duty, *Eccleſ.* xii. 13. *Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.* The fear and reverence of the divine majeſty is the great foundation and principle of religion; but obedience to God's laws is the life and practice of it. God does not expect that we ſhould ſpend the greateſt part of our time in the immediate acts of religion, and in the ſolemn duties of his worſhip and ſervice; but only that we ſhould allot a fitting proportion of our time to theſe, according to the circumſtances of our condition in this world, and the example of holy and good men that are in the like circumſtances with ourſelves. For ſuch is the goodneſs of God, that he does not only allow us to provide for the neceſſaries and conveniencies of this life; but hath made it our duty ſo to do. It is one of the precepts of the goſpel, which the Apoſtle chargeth the biſhops and teachers of the goſpel to inculcate frequently upon chriſtians, *that they which have believed in God, ſhould be careful to maintain good works*; that is, to employ themſelves in the works of an honeſt calling: *for neceſſary uſes*; that is for the ſupport of their families, and the relief of thoſe who are in want and neceſſity. And the Apoſtle lays great weight and ſtreſs upon this, as a very great duty, *Tit.* iii. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. Theſe things are good and profitable unto men*; that is, of general benefit and advantage to mankind.

So that no man's calling is a hindrance to religion, but a part of it; and by performing the duties of piety in their proper ſeaſons, and ſpending the reſt of our time in any honeſt and uſeful employment, we may make our whole life a perpetual ſerving of God; we may *glorify God* in our *eating and drinking*, and in all other lawful and uſeful actions of life. In ſerving the occaſions and neceſſities of life, with ſobriety and temperance, and in managing our worldly commerce with juſtice and integrity, we may ſerve God, and perform conſiderable duties of religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is ſinful, and manage the actions and concernments of this life with a due regard and ſubſerviency to the great intereſts of eternity, we may do the work of God all the while we are providing for ourſelves, and employed in the works of an honeſt calling: for God, who hath deſigned this life, in order to the other, conſiders the neceſſities of our preſent ſtate, and allows us to make proviſion for it.

There are ſome perſons indeed, whoſe birth and condition ſets them above the common employments of life, and the works of an ordinary calling: but theſe alſo have a work given them to do; for God hath ſent no man into the world to no purpoſe, and only *to take his paſtime therein*; *neque enim ita generati ſumus à natura, ut ad ludum & jocum facti eſſe videamur*; *ſed ad ſeveritatem potius, & quædam ſtudia graviora atque majora: For we are not* (ſays *Tully de offic. lib.* 1.) *ſo framed by nature, as if we were made for ſport and jeſt, but for more ſerious employments, and for greater and weightier buſineſs*; and thoſe who are tied to no particular calling, may allow ſo much larger portions of their time to religion, and the ſervice of God: and God likewiſe expects from them, that they ſhould be uſeful to mankind in ſome higher and nobler way, according to the publickneſs of their ſtation and influence. Such perſons may be ſerviceable to their country, and the affairs of government, and in the care of public juſtice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendering themſelves more fit for this ſervice. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their families, and in the prudent care and management of their eſtates, and in reconciling differences among their neighbours, and in conſidering the neceſſities of the poor, and providing for their ſupply.

So that beſides the proper work of religion, and the more immediate ſervice of God, every man in the world, how exempt ſoever his condition be from the common care and drudgery of human life, may find work enough wherein he may uſefully employ all his time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of mankind; and God expects it as a duty from ſuch, that every man ſhould employ himſelf in ſome work or other, ſuitable to the ſtation in which God hath placed him in this world.

II. The work which God hath given us to do in the world, conſiſts in doing what we can to further and promote the ſalvation of others. This chiefly lies upon *us*, who are *the miniſters of God*, and *to whom the word of reconciliation is committed*. We are more eſpecially commiſſion'd and appointed for this work, and are *ambaſſadors for Chriſt, to beſeech men in his ſtead to be reconciled to God*. We are ſent by God in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, *to watch for mens ſouls*, and to be inſtruments and means of their eternal happineſs. And therefore we who are ſent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work aſſigned us to do in the world, ought to be very vigorous and induſtrious in it: and this, whether we conſider the nature of our employment, or the glorious reward of it.

1. If we conſider the nature of our employment, both in reſpect of the honour and the happineſs of it. 'Tis the moſt honourable work that mortal man can be employed in; 'tis the ſame in kind, and in the main end and deſign of it, with that of the bleſſed Angels; for we alſo are *Miniſtring Spirits*, *ſent forth by God to miniſter for the good of thoſe who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation*. We are *the Meſſengers* and *Ambaſſadors of God* to men, ſent to treat with them about the terms of their peace and reconciliation with God, to offer ſalvation to them, and to direct them to the beſt ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the honour to be employed in the very ſame work that the Son of God was, when he was upon the earth, *to ſeek and to ſave them that are loſt*; and *to call ſinners to repentance*; and to carry on that work, whereof he himſelf

laid the foundation, when he was in the world. And what greater honour can be put upon the ſons of men, than to help forward that glorious deſign and undertaking of the Son of God, for the ſalvation of mankind?

And 'tis an employment no leſs happy than honourable; 'tis not to drudge about the mean and low concernments of this life, a perpetual toil and care about *what we ſhall eat and drink, and wherewithal we ſhall be clothed*, which is the buſineſs of a worldly employment; but it is a direct and immediate *ſeeking the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*, and a continual endeavour to promote theſe. It does not conſiſt in the labour of our body, and in bodily toil; but in the delightful exerciſe of our minds, about the beſt and nobleſt objects, God, and heaven, and eternity; in an earneſt and faithful endeavour by all wiſe ways and means to gain ſouls to God, and *to turn ſinners from the errors of their ways*, and to prevent their eternal ruin and deſtruction; and next to the procuring of our own happineſs, to be inſtrumental to the happineſs of others, which is certainly the moſt pleaſant and noble work that we can poſſibly be employed in; eſpecially if we conſider, that by the very nature of our employment we do at the ſame time, and by the very ſame means, carry on both theſe deſigns, of the ſalvation of ourſelves and others. So St. *Paul* tells *Timothy*, when he exhorts him upon this very conſideration, *to give himſelf wholly* to this bleſſed work; becauſe, ſays he, *in doing this, thou ſhalt both ſave thyſelf, and them that hear thee*, 1 *Tim.* iv. 16. And when two of the greateſt and beſt deſigns in the world, our own happineſs in the ſalvation of others, do ſo happily meet in one, and are jointly carried on by the ſame labour: this ought to be a great ſpur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, and *abundant in the work of the Lord*; and a mighty encouragement to us *to preach the word, to be inſtant in ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon*, and *to be examples to others, in word, in converſation, in charity, in ſpirit, in faith, in purity*; as St. *Paul* chargeth *Timothy* in the moſt ſolemn and awful manner, *before God and the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom*, 1 *Tim.* iv. 12. and 2 *Tim.* iv. 1. And then,

2. If we conſider the glorious reward of this work. If we be faithful and induſtrious in it, it will advance us to a higher degree of glory and happineſs in the other world. *They that be wiſe* (ſays the prophet, *Dan.* xii. 3.) *ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteouſneſs, as the ſtars for ever and ever.* They that are induſtrious in this work, as they are *worthy of double honour* in this world, ſo they ſhall ſhine with a double glory and luſtre in the other.

But though this work of promoting the ſalvation of others, be chiefly incumbent upon thoſe whoſe office it is to attend upon this very thing, yet we are all of us concerned in it; according to the advantages and opportunities we have for it. Every man is concern'd to help forward the ſalvation of his brother, and not to let him periſh, if he can help it; and it is in every man's power to contribute ſomething to this bleſſed work of ſaving others, by ſeaſonable counſel and advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but eſpecially by a holy and examplary converſation, by a ſhining virtue, which hath a ſilent power of perſuaſion, and I know not what ſecret charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it.

III. And in order to both theſe, the ſaving of ourſelves and others, this work which God hath given us to do in the world, conſiſts in the careful uſe and good huſbandry of our time; for without this, neither the one, nor the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpoſe. Time is the ſeaſon and opportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reaſon is one of the moſt valuable things; and yet nothing is more waſtefully ſpent, and more prodigally ſquandered away by a great part of mankind than this, which, next to our immortal ſouls, is of all other things moſt precious; becauſe upon the right uſe or abuſe of our time, our eternal happineſs or miſery does depend. Men have generally ſome guard upon themſelves, as to their money and eſtates, and will not with eyes open ſuffer others to rob and deprive them of it: But we will let any body almoſt rob us of our time, and are contented to expoſe this precious treaſure to every body's rapins and extortion, and can quietly look on, whilſt men thruſt in their hands, and take it out by whole handfuls, as if it were of no greater value than ſilver was in *Solomon*'s days, no more than *the ſtones in the ſtreet*. And yet when it is gone, all the ſilver and gold in the world cannot purchaſe and fetch back the leaſt moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the world for a very ſmall part of that time, which we parted with upon ſuch cheap and eaſy terms.

Good God! what a ſtupid and ſenſeleſs prodigality is this? do we conſider what we do, when we give away ſuch large portions of our time to our eaſe and pleaſure, to diverſion and idleneſs, to trifling and unprofitable converſation, to the making and receiving of impertinent viſits, and the uſual and almoſt inſeparable attendants thereof, ſpiteful obſervations upon them that are preſent, and ſlandering and backbiting thoſe that are abſent; (for the great deſign of moſt people in viſits, is not to better one another, but to ſpy and *make* faults, and not to *mend* them; to get time off their hands, to ſhew their fine cloaths, and to recommend themſelves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence;) when we part with it by wholeſale in ſleep and dreſſings, and can ſpend whole mornings between the comb and the glaſs, and the afternoon at Plays, and whole nights in gaming, or in riot, and lewdneſs, and intemperance; in all which people commonly waſte their money and their time together!

Nay how do even the beſt of us miſplace this precious treaſure; and though we do not employ it to wicked purpoſes, and in works of iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the beſt and nobleſt uſe, to the glory of God, and the good and ſalvation of men! By thus laying out this treaſure, we might *lay up for ourſelves treaſures in heaven*, and help others on in the way thither.

Thus our bleſſed Saviour employed his precious time, in *going about doing good*, in all kinds and upon all occaſions, healing the bodies, and enlightning the minds, and ſaving the ſouls of men: This was his buſineſs, and this was his delight; it was *his meat and drink*, and his very life, he ſpent himſelf in it, and ſacrificed his eaſe, and his ſafety, and his life to theſe great ends, for which he came into the world; he conſidered the goodneſs and the greatneſs of his work, and the little time he had to do it in, which made him inceſſantly induſtrious in it, and to run the race which was ſet before him with great ſpeed, and *to work while it is day*, becauſe he knew *the night would come when no man can work.* And this brings me to the

Second thing I obſerved from the text, namely, that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in; *while it is day. I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, whilſt it is day.* And this *day* comprehends all the opportunities of our life, which will be ſoon over, and therefore had need to be well ſpent. A great part of our life is paſt before the ſeaſon of working begins: it is a great while before the uſe of our reaſon begins, and we come to have our ſenſes exerciſed to diſcern between good and evil; before our underſtandings are ripe for the ſerious conſideration of God and religion, and for the due care of our ſouls, and for the eternal concernment of another world, ſo that this firſt part of our life is in a great meaſure uſeleſs and unprofitable to us, in regard to our great deſign. For infancy and childhood are but the dawnings of this day, and no fit time to work in; and youth which is as the morning of this day, though it is the flower of our time, and the moſt proper ſeaſon of all other, for the remembrance of God, and the impreſſions of religion; yet it is uſually poſſeſt by vanity and vice; the common cuſtom and practice of the world, hath devoted this beſt part of our age to the worſt employments, to the ſervice of ſin and of our luſts. How very few are there that lay hold of this opportunity, and employ it to the beſt purpoſes? And yet the following courſe of our lives doth in a great meaſure depend upon it; for moſt perſons do continue and hold on in the way in which they ſet out at firſt, whether it be good or bad. And thoſe who neglect to improve this firſt opportunity of their lives, do ſeldom recover themſelves afterwards. God's grace may ſeize upon men in any part of their lives; but according to the moſt ordinary methods of it, the foundations and principles of religion and virtue are moſt commonly laid in a pious and virtuous education. This is the great opportunity of our lives, which ſettleth and fixeth moſt men, either in a good or bad courſe, and the fortune of their whole lives does uſually follow it, and depend upon it.

'Tis true indeed our day continues many times a great while longer, and we are to work while it continues; and 'tis never too late to begin to do well, and to enter upon a good courſe: But there is no ſuch proper and advantageous ſeaſon for the beginning of this work, as in our youth and tender years. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of ſalvation.* God's grace is then moſt forward and ready to aſſiſt us; and we are then leaſt of all indiſpos'd for the receiving of the impreſſions of it; and the impreſſions of it do then go deepeſt into our minds, and are moſt laſting and durable. But if we neglect this opportunity, we provoke God by degrees to withdraw his Grace, and to take away his holy Spirit from us, and by degrees we ſettle in vicious habits, and are every day more and more *harden'd through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* It is never too late to work while the day laſts; but the ſooner we begin this work, and ſet about it in good earneſt, the eaſier we ſhall find it; if we defer it late, every ſtep will be up the hill, and againſt the grain.

Thirdly, After this ſeaſon is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working; when this day is once at an end, then *cometh the night when no man can work.* The night is a time unfit for work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had never ſo great mind to it; and there is ſuch a night coming upon every one of us, and Wo be to us if we have our work to do when the night overtakes us.

There is uſually an evening before this night, when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impoſſible, to do this work; and this is the time of ſickneſs and old age, in which men are commonly unfit for any work; but moſt of all, that which requires the whole force and vigour of our minds, the buſineſs of religion. If we attempt this work then, we ſhall go very heartleſly about it, and do it very imperfectly, and be forc'd to ſlubber it over, and to huddle it up in great haſte and confuſion, and ſo as we can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how unfit are men to do any thing, when they are full of the ſenſe of their own infirmities, and life itſelf is become ſo great a burden to them, that they are hardly able to ſtand under it! How uncapable ſhall we then be of doing the greateſt and moſt momentous work of our lives, when our faculties are almoſt quite ſpent and worn out, and all the powers of life are decay'd in us; when our underſtandings are dark and dull, our memories frail and treacherous, and our *hearts* hard and *deceitful above all things!* When ſickneſs and old age overtake us, we ſhall then find to our ſorrow, that *ſufficient for* that *day is the evil thereof*; we ſhall have need then of nothing elſe to do, but to bear our infirmities with patience and decency; and it is well if we can rally together, of the broken forces of our reaſon, ſo much as may be a ſufficient guard to us againſt peeviſhneſs and diſcontent; we had need then have nothing elſe to do, but to be old and weak, to be ſick and die.

Beſides, how can we expect that God ſhould accept of any work that we do at ſuch a time? With what face can we put off God with the dregs of our life? or how can we hope that he will be pleaſed with the ſervice of thoſe years, which we ourſelves *take no pleaſure in? if we offer the lame in ſacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, is it not evil? offer it now to thy Governor, and ſee if he will be pleaſed with thee.*

And ſickneſs is commonly as bad a time as old age, and uſually incumber'd with greater difficulties, and clog'd with more indiſpoſitions. If a violent diſtemper ſeize upon us, it many times takes away the uſe of our reaſon, and deprives us of all opportunity of conſideration; it makes us both inſenſible of the danger of our condition, and incapable of uſing the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected religion before, and have put off the great work of our life to the end of it, our opportunity is irrecoverably loſt; for there is nothing to be done in religion, when our reaſon is once departed from us; *the night is* then *come* indeed, and *darkneſs hath overtaken us*; and tho' we be ſtill alive, yet are we as unfit for any work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no ſuch rare and extraordinary caſe; for it happens to many; and every man that wilfully defers the work of religion and repentance to a dying hour, hath reaſon to fear that he ſhall be thus ſurpriſed in his ſin and ſecurity, and by the juſt judgment of God depriv'd of all the opportunity of life and ſalvation, while he is yet in the land of the living.

But if God be more merciful unto us, and viſit us with ſuch a ſickneſs as leaves us the uſe of our underſtandings, yet all that we do in religion at ſuch a time, proceeds from ſo violent a cauſe, from the preſent terror of death, and the dreadful apprehenſion of that eternal miſery which is juſt ready to ſwallow us up, that it is one of the hardeſt things in the world, not only for others, but even for ourſelves, to know whether our reſolutions, and this ſudden and haſty fit of repentance be ſincere or not: For it is natural, and almoſt unavoidable, for a man to repent, and be ſorry for what he hath done, when he is going to execution: But the great queſtion is, What this man would do, if his life were ſpared? Whether his repentance would hold good, and he would become a new man, and change his former courſe of life, or relapſe into it again? And it is by no means certain, that he would not be as bad as he was before: Becauſe we ſee many, who, when they lie upon a ſick bed, give all imaginable teſtimony of a deep ſorrow, and a hearty repentance for their ſins, who yet upon their recovery return to their former ſins with a greater appetite, and make themſelves *ten times more the children of wrath than they were before.* So that all the work that we can do at ſuch a time ought not to be much reckoned upon, and can give us little or no comfort; becauſe it is ſo infinitely uncertain whether it be real and ſincere, and whether the effect of ſo violent a cauſe would laſt and continue if the cauſe were removed. Therefore *we ſhould work while it is day*; for whatever we do in this evening of our lives, will be done with great difficulty, and with very doubtful ſucceſs.

But beſides this evening, there is *a night coming, when no man can work:* Death will ſeize upon us, and then our ſtate will be irrecoverably concluded; after that it will be impoſſible for us to do any thing towards our own ſalvation, or to have any thing done for us by others; the prayers of the living will not avail the dead, *as the tree falls, ſo it lies; there is no wiſdom, nor counſel, nor device in the grave whither we are going*; therefore according to the counſel of the wiſe man, *what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might.*

This counſel concerns all ages and perſons. I will apply it to the young, in the words of the wiſe preacher, *Eccleſ.* xii. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them.* To them who are in the vigour of their age, in the words of the Prophet, *Iſa. chap.* lv. 6. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.* And to them that are old, in the words of another Prophet, *Jer.* xiii. 16. *Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cauſeth darkneſs, and before your feet ſtumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the ſhadow of death, and make it groſs darkneſs.* And let us, every one of us, of what age or condition ſoever, apply it to ourſelves, in the words of our bleſſed Saviour here in the text, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.*

SERMON XLVIII.

Of the great Duties of Natural Religion, with the Ways and Means of knowing them.

MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8.

Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with Calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of Rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of Oil? ſhall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?

He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Prophet tells the people of *Iſrael*, that *the Lord had a controverſy with them*; and that he might direct them how to take up this quarrel, he brings in one making this enquiry in the name of the people; *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God?* That is, by what kind of worſhip or devotion may I addreſs myſelf to him in the moſt acceptable manner? by what means may I hope to appeaſe his diſpleaſure? To ſatisfy this enquiry, he firſt inſtanceth in the chief kinds of ſacrifices and expiations that were in uſe among the *Jews and Heathens: Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings?* the conſtant ſacrifice that was offered to God by way of acknowledgment of his dominion over the creatures: *with calves of a year old?* which was the ſin-offering which the high-prieſt offered for himſelf. Or will he rather accept of thoſe great and coſtly ſacrifices which were offered upon ſolemn and publick occaſions, ſuch as that was which *Solomon* offered at the dedication of the temple? *Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of Rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of Oil?* Or if none of theſe will do, ſhall I try to atone him after the manner of the *Heathen*, by the deareſt thing in the world, the firſt-born of my children? *Shall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?* If God was to be appeaſed at all, ſurely they thought it muſt be by ſome of theſe ways, for beyond theſe they could imagine nothing of greater value and efficacy.

But the Prophet tells them that they were quite out of the way, in thinking to pacify God upon theſe terms; that there are other things which are much better and more pleaſing to him than any of theſe ſacrifices. For ſome of them were expreſly forbidden by God, as *the offering up of our Children*; and for the reſt, they were not good in themſelves, but merely by virtue of their inſtitution, and becauſe they were commanded. But the things which he would recommend to them, are ſuch as are good in their own nature, and required of us by God upon that account. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

So that in theſe words you have,

Firſt, An enquiry which is the beſt way to appeaſe God when he is offended? *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God?*

Secondly, The way that men are apt to take in this caſe; and that is by ſome external piece of religion and devotion; ſuch as ſacrifice was both among *Jews* and *Heathens*. *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings*, &c. By which queſtions the Prophet intimates that men are very apt to pitch upon this courſe.

Thirdly, The courſe which God himſelf directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee*, &c.

The *firſt* being a meer queſtion, there needs no more to be ſaid of it; only that it is a queſtion of great importance; what is the moſt effectual way to appeaſe God when we have offended him? For who can bear his indignation, and who can ſtand before him, when once he is angry? Let us conſider then, in the

Second place, the way that men are apt to take to pacify God; and that is by ſome external piece of religion and devotion, ſuch as were ſacrifices among the *Jews* and *Heathens. Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings?* This is the way which men are moſt apt to chooſe. The *Jews*, you ſee, pitch'd upon the external parts of their religion, thoſe which were moſt pompous and ſolemn, the richeſt and moſt coſtly ſacrifices; ſo they might but keep their ſins, they were well enough content to offer up any thing elſe to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

And thus it is among ourſelves, when we apprehend God is diſpleaſed with us, and his judgments are abroad in the earth, we are content to do any thing, but *to learn righteouſneſs*; we are willing to ſubmit to any kind of external devotion and humiliation, to faſt and pray, to afflict ourſelves and to cry mightily unto God; things ſome of them good in themſelves, but the leaſt part of that which God requires of us.

And as for the Church of *Rome*, in caſe of publick judgments and calamities, they are the moſt inquiſitive and (as they pretend) the moſt ſkilful people in the world to pacify God; and they have a thouſand ſolemn devices to this purpoſe. I do not wrong them, by repreſenting them enquiring after this manner. "Shall I go before a *Crucifix*, and bow myſelf to it, as to *the high God?* And becauſe the Lord is *a great King*, and it is perhaps too much boldneſs and arrogancy to make immediate addreſſes always to him; to which of the *Saints* or *Angels* ſhall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of *Pater-Noſters*, or with ten thouſands of *Ave-Marys?* Shall the *Hoſt* travel in proceſſion, or myſelf undertake a tedious *Pilgrimage?* Or ſhall I liſt myſelf a Soldier for *the holy war*, or for *the extirpation of hereticks?* Shall I give half my eſtate to a *Convent*

" for my tranſgreſſion, or chaſtiſe and puniſh my body for the ſin of my ſoul?" Thus men deceive themſelves, and will ſubmit to all the extravagant ſeverities, that the petulancy and folly of men can deviſe and impoſe upon them. And indeed it is not to be imagined, when men are once under the power of ſuperſtition, how ridiculous they may be, and yet think themſelves religious; how prodigiouſly they may play the fool, and yet believe they pleaſe God; what cruel and barbarous things they may do to themſelves and others, and yet be *verily perſuaded they do God good ſervice.*

And what is the myſtery of all this, but that men are loth to do that, without which nothing elſe that we do is acceptable to God? They *hate to be reformed*; and for this reaſon, they will be content to do any thing, rather than be put to the trouble of mending themſelves; every thing is eaſy in compariſon of this task, and God may have any terms of them, ſo he will let them be quiet in their ſins, and excuſe them from the real virtues of a good life. And this brings me to the

Third thing, which I principally intended to ſpeak to. The courſe which God himſelf directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* In the handling of which, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider thoſe ſeveral duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us.

Secondly, By what ways and means God hath diſcovered theſe duties to us, and the goodneſs of them; *he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good*, &c.

I. We will briefly conſider the ſeveral duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us. *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

It was uſual among the *Jews* to reduce all the duties of religion to theſe three heads, *juſtice*, *mercy*, and *piety*; under the firſt two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another; and under the third, the duties which we owe to God.

1. *Juſtice.* And I was going to tell you what it is, but I conſidered that every man knows it, as well as any definition can explain it to him. I ſhall only put you in mind of ſome of the principal inſtances of it, and the ſeveral virtues comprehended under it. And,

Firſt, Juſtice is concerned in the making of laws, that they be ſuch as are equal and reaſonable, uſeful and beneficial, for the honour of God and religion, and for the publick good of human ſociety; this is a great truſt, in the diſcharge of which, if men be biaſſed by favour or intereſt, and drawn aſide from the conſideration and regard of the publick good, it is a far greater crime, and of worſe conſequence than any private act of injuſtice between man and man.

And then, juſtice is alſo concerned in the due execution of laws; which are the guard of private property, the ſecurity of publick peace, and of religion and good manners. And,

Laſtly, In the obſervance of laws and obedience to them; which is a debt that every man owes to human ſociety.

But more eſpecially juſtice is concerned in the obſervance of thoſe laws, whether of God or man, which reſpect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourſe with one another. That we uſe honeſty and integrity in all our dealings, in oppoſition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity, in oppoſition to falſhood and breach of truſt; equity and good conſcience, in oppoſition to all kind of oppreſſion and exaction. Theſe are the principal branches and inſtances of this great and comprehenſive duty of juſtice; the violation whereof is ſo much the greater ſin, becauſe this virtue is the firmeſt bond of human ſociety, upon the obſervation whereof, the peace and happineſs of mankind does ſo much depend.

2. *Mercy*, which does not only ſignify the inward affection of pity and compaſſion towards thoſe that are in miſery and neceſſity, but the effects of it, in the actual relief of thoſe whoſe condition calls for our charitable help and aſſiſtance; by feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, and viſiting the ſick, and vindicating the oppreſſed, and comforting the afflicted, and miniſtring eaſe and relief to them if it be in our power. And this is a very lovely virtue, and argues more goodneſs in men than meer *juſtice* doth. For *juſtice* is a ſtrict debt; but *mercy* is favour and kindneſs. And this perhaps may be the reaſon of the different expreſſions in the text, that when God barely commands us *to do juſtly*, he requires we ſhould *love mercy*, that is, take a

particular pleaſure and delight in the exerciſe of this virtue, which is ſo proper and agreeable to mankind, that we commonly call it *humanity*, giving it its name from our very nature. In ſhort, it is ſo excellent a virtue, that I ſhould be very ſorry that any religion ſhould be able to pretend to the practice of it more than our own.

3. *Piety; to walk humbly with thy God. To walk humbly in the fear of the Lord*; ſo the *Chaldee* paraphraſe renders theſe words. And this phraſe may comprehend all thoſe acts of religion which refer immediately to God; a firm belief of his being and perfections; an awful ſenſe of him, as the dread Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world; a due regard to his ſervice, and a reverent behaviour of ourſelves towards him in all acts of worſhip and religion, in oppoſition to Atheiſm and a prophane neglect and contempt of God and religion; a new and monſtrous kind of impiety! which of late years hath broke in upon us, and got head among us, not only contrary to the example of former ages, but in deſpite of the very genius and temper of the nation, which is naturally devout and zealous in religion.

Or elſe this phraſe of *walking humbly with God*, may refer more particularly to the poſture and condition of the people of *Iſrael* at that time, who were fallen under the heavy diſpleaſure of God for their ſins. And then the duty required is, that being ſenſible how highly God hath been offended by us, by the general corruption and vitiouſneſs of the age, which like a Leproſy hath ſpread itſelf almoſt over the whole body of the nation, and by that open lewdneſs and thoſe inſolent impieties which are daily committed amongſt us; I ſay, that being deeply ſenſible of this, we do with all humility acknowledge our ſins to God, and repent of them, and implore his mercy and forgiveneſs, and reſolve by his grace *to turn every one from the evil of our ways*, and from *the wickedneſs that is in our hands*; which God grant we may every one do * *this day* according to the pious deſign and intention of it. And if we be ſincere in this reſolution, *who can tell but God will turn and repent, and turn away his anger from us, that we periſh not.* Nay, we have great reaſon to believe, that he will be pacified towards us. So he hath declared, *Iſa.* i. 16. *Waſh ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well, ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow; come now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord; though your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white as ſnow, though they be red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool.* But if we continue unreformed, God will ſay to us, as he does there to the people of *Iſrael, To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? your calling of aſſemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting; and when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.* To which, let me add that excellent ſaying of the Son of *Sirach* to this purpoſe, *Ecclus.* xxxiv. 25, 26. *He that waſheth himſelf after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his waſhing? So is it with a man that faſteth for his ſins, and goeth again and doth the ſame things. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?*

II. Let us conſider by what ways and means God hath made known theſe duties to us, and the goodneſs and the obligation of them. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee?* I ſhall mention *five* ways whereby God hath diſcovered this to us.

1. By a kind of natural inſtinct.
2. By natural reaſon.
3. By the general vote and conſent of mankind.
4. By external revelation.
5. By the inward dictates and motions of God's Spirit upon the minds of men.

Firſt, By a kind of natural inſtinct, by which I mean a ſecret impreſſion upon the minds of men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve ſome things as good and fit, and to diſlike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call *a natural inſtinct*, becauſe it does not ſeem to proceed ſo much from the exerciſe of our reaſon, as from a natural propenſion and inclination, like thoſe inſtincts, which are in brute creatures, of natural affection and care toward their young ones. And that theſe inclinations are precedent to all reaſon and diſcourſe about them, evidently appears by this, that they do put forth themſelves every whit as vigorouſly in young perſons, as in thoſe of riper reaſon; in the rude and ignorant ſort of people, as in thoſe who are more poliſh'd and refin'd. For we ſee plainly that the young and ignorant have as ſtrong impreſſions of piety and devotion, as true a ſenſe of gratitude

* *This Sermon was preach'd upon occaſion of a publick Faſt.*

and juſtice and pity, as the wiſer and more knowing part of mankind. A plain indication, that the reaſon of mankind is prevented by a kind of *natural inſtinct* and *anticipation* concerning the good or evil, the comelineſs or deformity of theſe things. And though this do not equally extend to all the inſtances of our duty, yet as to the great lines and eſſential parts of it, mankind hardly need to conſult any other oracle, than the mere propenſions and inclinations of their nature; as, whether we ought to reverence the divine nature, to be grateful to thoſe who have confer'd benefits upon us, to ſpeak the truth, to be faithful to our promiſe, to reſtore that which is committed to us in truſt, to pity and relieve thoſe that are in miſery, and in all things to do to others as we would have them do to us. And this will further appear, if we conſider theſe two things:

1. That men are naturally innocent or guilty to themſelves, according to what they do in theſe things. So the Apoſtle tells us, *Rom.* ii. 14, 15. *When the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, theſe having not the law, are a law unto themſelves, and do ſhew the effect of the law written in their hearts, their conſciences alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts by turns,* (that is, according as they do well or ill) *accuſing or excuſing them.* There is a ſecret comfort in innocence, and a ſtrange pleaſure and ſatisfaction in being acquitted by our own minds for what we do. But on the contrary, when we contradict theſe natural dictates, what uneaſineſs do we find in our own breaſts? Nay even before the fact is committed, our conſcience is ſtrangely diſquieted at the thoughts of it. When a man does but deſign to do a bad thing, he is as guilty to himſelf, as if he had committed it. Of this we have a conſiderable inſtance, in the firſt violence that was offered to nature, *Gen.* iv. 6. *The Lord ſaid unto Cain, why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?* The very thought of that wickedneſs which he did but then deſign, did diſorder his mind, and make a change in his very countenance. Guilt is the natural concomitant of heinous crimes, which ſo ſoon as ever a man commits, his ſpirit receives a ſecret wound, which cauſeth a great deal of ſmart and anguiſh. For guilt is reſtleſs, and puts the mind of man into an unnatural working and fermentation, never to be ſettled again but by repentance. *The wicked are like the troubled ſea when it cannot reſt*; which plainly ſhews that the mind of man hath a kind of *natural ſenſe* of good and evil; becauſe whenever we offend againſt nature, our conſciences are touched to the quick, and we receive a ſting into our ſoul, which ſhoots and pains us, whenever we reflect upon what we have done. I appeal to that witneſs which every man carries in his breaſt, whether this be not true.

2. Men are naturally full of hopes and fears, according as they follow or go againſt theſe natural dictates. A good conſcience is apt to fill men with confidence and good hopes. It does not only give eaſe, but ſecurity to the mind of man, againſt the dread of inviſible powers, and the fearful apprehenſions of a future judgment. Whereas guilt fills men with diſmal apprehenſions of danger, and continual miſgivings concerning their own ſafety. Thus it was with *Cain* after he had ſlain his brother; *It ſhall come to paſs, that every one that findeth me ſhall ſlay me.* Nay, when a man hath done a ſecret fault, which none can accuſe him of, yet then is he haunted with the terrors of his own mind, and cannot be ſecure in his own apprehenſions; which plainly ſhews that men are conſcious to themſelves, when they do well, and when they do amiſs; and that the ſame *natural inſtinct* which prompts men to their duty, fills them with good hopes when they have done it, and with ſecret fears and apprehenſions of danger when they have done contrary to it.

Secondly, God ſhews man what is good, by natural reaſon; and that *two* ways; by the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our happineſs and intereſt.

Firſt, Reaſon ſhews us the convenience of things to our nature; and whatever is agreeable to the primitive deſign and intention of nature, that we call *good*; whatever is contrary thereto, we call *evil*. For example *to honour and love God*. It is natural to honour great power and perfection, and to love goodneſs wherever it is. So likewiſe, *gratitude* is natural, to acknowledge benefits receiv'd, and to be ready to requite them, and the contrary is monſtrous, and univerſally abhorred; and there is no greater ſign that any thing is contrary to nature, than if it be deteſted by the whole kind. It is agreeable alſo to nature to be *juſt*, and *to do to others, as we would have them to do to us*; for this is to make our own natural inclinations and deſires the rule of our dealing with others; and *to be merciful*; for no man that hath not diveſted himſelf of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling a pain in himſelf.

Secondly, Reaſon ſhews us the tendency of theſe things to our happineſs and intereſt. And indeed the notion of *good* and *evil* does commonly refer to the conſequences of things, and we call that *good*, which will bring ſome benefit and advantage to us, and that *evil* which is likely to produce ſome miſchief and inconvenience; and by this rule reaſon diſcovers to us that theſe duties are *good.*

To begin with *piety* towards God. Nothing can more evidently tend to our intereſt, than to make him our friend, upon whoſe favour our happineſs depends. So likewiſe for *gratitude*; it is a virtue, to which if nature did not prompt us, our intereſt would direct us; for every man is ready to place benefits there where he may hope for a thankful return. *Temperance* does apparently conduce to our health, which, next to a good conſcience, is the moſt pleaſant and valuable thing in the world; whereas the intemperate man is an open enemy to himſelf, and continually making aſſaults upon his own life. *Mercy* and *pity* are not more welcome to others, than they are delightful and beneficial to ourſelves; for we do not only gratify our own nature and bowels, by relieving thoſe who are in miſery, but we provoke mankind by our example to the like tenderneſs, and do prudently beſpeak the commiſeration of others towards us, when it ſhall be our turn to ſtand in need of it. And if we be wiſe enough, our reaſon will likewiſe direct us to be *juſt*, as the ſureſt art of thriving in this world; it gives a man a reputation, which is a powerful advantage in all the affairs of this world; it is the ſhorteſt and eaſieſt way of diſpatching buſineſs, the plaineſt, and leaſt intangled; and though it be not ſo *ſudden* a way of growing rich, as fraud and oppreſſion: yet it is much *ſurer* and more *laſting*, and not liable to thoſe terrible back-blows and after-reckonings, to which eſtates got by injuſtice are.

And natural reaſon does not only ſhew us that theſe things are *good*, but that *the Lord requires them of us*, that is, that they have the force and obligation of *laws.* For there needs nothing more to make any thing *a law*, than a ſufficient declaration, that it is *the will of God*; and this God hath ſufficiently ſignified to mankind by the very frame of our natures, and of thoſe principles and faculties which he hath endu'd us withal; ſo that whenever we act contrary to theſe, we plainly diſobey the will of him that made us, and violate thoſe laws which he hath enacted in our natures, and written upon our hearts.

And this is all the *law* that the greateſt part of mankind were under, before the revelation of the Goſpel. From *Adam* to *Moſes*, the world was almoſt ſolely governed by the *natural law*; which ſeems to be the meaning of that hard text, *Rom.* v. 13. *For until the law ſin was in the world*, that is, before the *law* of *Moſes* was given, men were capable of offending againſt ſome *other law*, for otherwiſe ſin could not have been imputed to them, for *ſin is not imputed where there is no law.* And then it follows; *Nevertheleſs death reigned from Adam to Moſes, even over them that had not ſinned after the ſimilitude of Adam's tranſgreſſion*, that is, during that ſpace from *Adam* to *Moſes*, men ſinned againſt the *natural law*, and were liable to death upon that account, though they had not offended againſt an expreſs revelation from God, as *Adam* had done; for *that* the Apoſtle ſeems to mean, by *ſinning after the ſimilitude of Adam's tranſgreſſion.*

Thirdly, God hath ſhewn us what is good by the general vote and conſent of mankind. Not that all mankind do agree concerning virtue and vice; but that as to the greater duties of *piety*, *juſtice*, *mercy*, and the like, the exceptions are but few in compariſon, and not enough to infringe a general conſent. And of this I ſhall offer to you this threefold evidence.

1. That theſe virtues are generally prais'd and held in eſteem by mankind, and the contrary vices generally reproved and evil ſpoken of. Now to praiſe any thing, is to give teſtimony to the goodneſs of it, and to cenſure any thing, is to declare that we believe it to be evil. And if we conſult the hiſtory of all ages, we ſhall find that the things which are generally prais'd in the lives of men, and recommended to the imitation of poſterity, are piety and devotion, gratitude and juſtice, humanity and charity; and that the contrary to theſe are marked with ignominy and reproach; the former are commended even in enemies, and the latter are branded even by thoſe who had a kindneſs for the perſons that were guilty of them. So conſtant hath mankind always been in the commendation of virtue, and in the cenſure of vice. Nay we find not only thoſe who are virtuous themſelves giving their teſtimony and applauſe to virtue, but even thoſe who are vicious; not out of love to goodneſs, but from the conviction of

their own minds, and from a ſecret reverence they bear to the common conſent and opinion of mankind. And this is a great teſtimony, becauſe it is the teſtimony of an enemy extorted by the meer light and force of truth.

And on the contrary; nothing is more ordinary than for *vice to reprove ſin*, and to hear men condemn the like, or the ſame things in others, which they allow in themſelves. And this is a clear evidence, that vice is generally condemned by mankind, that many men condemn it in themſelves; and thoſe who are ſo kind as to ſpare themſelves, are very quick-ſighted to ſpy a fault in any body elſe, and will cenſure a bad action done by another, with as much freedom and impartiality, as the moſt virtuous man in the world.

And to this conſent of mankind about virtue and vice, the Scripture frequently appeals. As when it commands us *to provide things honeſt in the ſight of all men; and by well doing to put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men*; intimating that there are ſome things ſo confeſſedly good, and owned to be ſuch by ſo general a vote of mankind, that the worſt of men have not the face to open their mouths againſt them. And it is made the character of a virtuous action, if it be *lovely* and *commendable*, and *of good report*. Phil. iv. 8. *Whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, make account of theſe things*; intimating to us, that mankind do generally concur in the praiſe and commendation of what is virtuous.

2. Men do generally glory and ſtand upon their innocency, when they do virtuouſly; but are aſhamed, and out of countenance, when they do the contrary. Now glory and ſhame are nothing elſe but an appeal to the judgment of others concerning the good or evil of our actions. There are indeed ſome ſuch monſters as are impudent in their impieties, but theſe are but few in compariſon. Generally mankind is modeſt, the greateſt part of thoſe who do evil are apt to bluſh at their own faults, and to confeſs them in their countenance, which is an acknowledgment that they are not only guilty to themſelves that they have done amiſs, but that they are apprehenſive that others think ſo. For guilt is a paſſion reſpecting ourſelves, but ſhame regards others. Now it is a ſign of ſhame, that men love to conceal their faults from others, and commit them ſecretly, in the dark and without witneſſes, and are afraid even of a child or a fool: Or if they be diſcovered in them, they are ſolicitous to excuſe and extenuate them, and ready to lay the fault upon any body elſe, or to transfer their guilt, or as much of it as they can, upon others. All which are certain tokens, that men are not only naturally guilty to themſelves, when they commit a fault; but that they are ſenſible alſo what opinions others have of theſe things.

And on the contrary, men are apt to ſtand upon their juſtification, and to glory when they have done well. The conſcience of a man's own virtue and integrity, lifts up his head and gives him confidence before others, becauſe he is ſatisfied they have a good opinion of his actions. What a good face does a man naturally ſet upon a good deed? And how does he ſneak, when he hath done wickedly, being ſenſible that he is condemned by others, as well as by himſelf? No man is afraid of being upbraided for having dealt honeſtly or kindly with others, nor does account it any calumny or reproach, to have it reported of him, that he is a ſober and chaſte man. No man bluſheth, when he meets a man with whom he hath kept his word, and diſcharged his truſt: but every man is apt to do ſo, when he meets one with whom he has dealt diſhoneſtly, or who knows ſome notorious crime by him.

3. Vice is generally forbidden and puniſh'd by human laws: but againſt the contrary virtues there never was any law. Some vices are ſo manifeſtly evil in themſelves, or ſo miſchievous to human ſociety, that the laws of moſt nations have taken care to diſcountenance them by ſevere penalties. Scarce any nation was ever ſo barbarous, as not to maintain and vindicate the honour of their Gods and religion by publick laws. Murder and adultery, rebellion and ſedition, perjury and breach of truſt, fraud and oppreſſion, are vices ſeverely prohibited by the laws of moſt nations. A clear indication, what opinion the generality of mankind, and the wiſdom of nations have always had of theſe things.

But now againſt the contrary virtues there never was any law. No man was ever impeach'd for *living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world*. A plain acknowledgment, that mankind always thought them good, and never were ſenſible of the inconvenience of them; for had they been ſo, they would have provided againſt them by laws. This St. *Paul* takes notice of as a great commendation of the chriſtian virtues; *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, kindneſs, fidelity, meekneſs, temperance; againſt ſuch there is no law*; the greateſt evidence that could be given, that theſe things are unqueſtionably *good* in the eſteem of mankind, *againſt ſuch there is no law*. As if he had ſaid, turn over the law of *Moſes*, ſearch thoſe of *Athens*, and *Sparta*, and the *twelve tables of the Romans*, and thoſe innumerable laws that have been added ſince; and you ſhall not in any of them find any of thoſe virtues that I have mentioned, condemned and forbidden. A clear evidence that mankind never took any exception againſt them, but are generally agreed about the goodneſs of them.

Fourthly, God hath ſhewn us what is good by external revelation. In former ages of the world, God revealed his will to particular perſons in an extraordinary manner, and more eſpecially to the nation of the *Jews*, the reſt of the world being in a great meaſure left to the conduct of natural light. But in theſe latter ages he hath made publick revelation of his will by his Son. And this as to the matter of our duty, is the ſame in ſubſtance with the law of nature; for our Saviour comprehends all under theſe two general heads, *the love of God*, and *of our neighbour*. The Apoſtle reduceth all to three, *ſobriety*, *juſtice*, and *piety*; *The grace of God that brings ſalvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* So that if we believe the Apoſtle, the Goſpel teacheth us the very ſame things which nature dictated to men before; only it hath made a more perfect diſcovery of them. So that whatever was doubtful and obſcure before, is now certain and plain; the duties are ſtill the ſame, only it offers us more powerful arguments, and a greater aſſiſtance to the performance of thoſe duties; ſo that we may now much better ſay, than the Prophet could in his days, *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what it is that the Lord requires of thee.*

Fifthly and *laſtly*, God ſhews us what is good by the motions of his Spirit upon the minds of men. This the ſcripture aſſures us of, and good men have experience more eſpecially of it; though it be hard to give an account of it, and to ſay what motions are from the Spirit of God, and what from our own minds; for *as the wind blows where it liſteth, and we hear the ſound of it, but know not whence it comes nor whither it goes*; ſo are the operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, ſecret and imperceptible.

And thus I have done with the *three* things I propounded to ſpeak to. All that now remains, is to make ſome *inferences* from what hath been ſaid, by way of application.

Firſt, Seeing God hath ſo abundantly provided that we ſhould know our duty, we are altogether inexcuſable, if we do not do it. Becauſe *he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of thee*; therefore *thou art inexcuſable, O man whoſoever thou art*, who liveſt in a contradiction to this light. God hath acquainted us with our duty, by ſuch ways as may moſt effectually both direct and engage us to the practice of it; we are prompted to it by a kind of natural inſtinct, and ſtrong impreſſions upon our minds of the difference of good and evil; we are led to the knowledge, and urged to the practice of it, by our nature, and by our reaſon, and by our intereſt, and by that which is commonly very prevalent among men, the general voice and conſent of mankind; and by the moſt powerful and governing paſſions in human nature, by hope and by fear, and by ſhame; by the proſpect of advantage, by the apprehenſion of danger, and by the ſenſe of honour; and to take away all poſſible excuſe of ignorance from us, by an expreſs revelation from God, the cleareſt and moſt perfect that ever was made to the world. So that whenever we do contrary to our duty, in any of theſe great inſtances, we offend againſt all theſe, and do in the higheſt degree fall under the heavy ſentence of our Saviour, *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light.*

Secondly, You ſee hence what are the great duties of religion, which God mainly requires of us, and how reaſonable they are; *piety* towards God, and *juſtice* and *charity* towards men; the knowledge whereof is planted in our nature, and grows up with our reaſon. And theſe are things which are unqueſtionably *good*, and againſt which we can have no exception; things that were never reproved, nor found fault with by mankind, neither our nature nor our reaſon riſeth up againſt them, or dictates any thing to the contrary. We have all the obligation, and we have all the encouragement to them, and are ſecure on all hands in the practice of them. In the doing of theſe things, there is no danger to us from the laws of men, no fear of diſpleaſure from God, no offence or ſting from our own minds.

And theſe things, which are ſo agreeable to our nature, and our reaſon, and our intereſt, are the great things which our religion requires of us, more valuable in themſelves, and more acceptable to God than *whole burnt-offerings and ſacrifices*; more than *thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil*; more than if we offered to him *all the beaſts of the foreſt, and the cattle upon a thouſand hills.* We are not to neglect any inſtitution of God; but above all, we are to ſecure the obſervance of thoſe great duties to which we are directed by our very nature, and tied by the ſureſt and moſt ſacred of all other laws, thoſe which God hath riveted in our ſouls, and written upon our hearts: and that mankind might have no pretence left to excuſe them from theſe, the Chriſtian religion hath ſet us free from thoſe many poſitive and outward obſervances, that the *Jewiſh* religion was incumber'd withal; that we might be wholly intent upon theſe great duties, and mind nothing in compariſon of the real and ſubſtantial virtues of a good life.

Thirdly, You ſee, in the laſt place, what is the beſt way to appeaſe the diſpleaſure of God towards a ſinful nation. God ſeems to have as great a controverſy with us, as he had with the people of *Iſrael*, and his wrath is of late years moſt viſibly gone out againſt us; and proportionably to the full meaſure of our ſins, it hath been poured out upon us in full vials. How have the judgments of God followed us? And how cloſe have they followed one another? What fearful calamities have our eyes ſeen? enough to make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle. What terrible and hazardous wars have we been engaged in? What a raging peſtilence did God ſend among us, that ſwept away thouſands, and ten thouſands in our ſtreets? What a dreadful and fatal fire, that was not to be checked and reſiſted in its courſe, till it had laid in aſhes one of the greateſt and richeſt cities in the world? What unſeaſonable weather have we had of late? as if for the wickedneſs of men upon the earth, the very *ordinances of heaven* were *changed*, and *ſummer, and winter, ſeed-time, and harveſt*, had forgotten their *appointed ſeaſons.* And which is more and ſadder than all this, what dangerous attempts have been made upon our religion, by the reſtleſs adverſaries of it?

And now ſurely, *after all this is come upon us for our ſins*, it is time for us to look up to him that ſmites us, and to think of taking up this quarrel. 'Tis time to inquire as they do in the text, *wherewithal ſhall we come before the Lord, and bow ourſelves before the high God?* And we are apt to take the ſame courſe they did, to endeavour to appeaſe God by ſome external devotion. We have now betaken ourſelves to prayer and faſting, and 'twas very fit, nay neceſſary we ſhould ſo do; but let us not think this is all God expects from us. Theſe are but the *means* to a further *end*, to oblige us for the future to the practice of a good life. The outward profeſſion of religion is not loſt amongſt us, there appears ſtill in men a great and commendable zeal for the reform'd religion, and there hath been too much occaſion for it; but that which God chiefly expects from us, is reform'd lives. Piety and virtue are in a great meaſure gone from among us, the manners of men are ſtrangely corrupted, *the great and weighty things of the law* are neglected, *juſtice* and *mercy*, *temperance* and *chaſtity*, *truth* and *fidelity*, ſo that we may take up *David*'s complaint, *Help Lord! for the righteous man ceaſeth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

And till the nation be brought back to a ſober ſenſe of religion, from an airy and phantaſtical piety, to real and unaffected devotion, and from a factious contention about things indifferent, to the ſerious practice of what is neceſſary; from our violent heats and animoſities, to a more peaceable temper, and by a mutual condeſcenſion on all ſides, to a nearer and ſtronger union among ourſelves, till we recover in ſome meaſure our ancient virtue and integrity of manners, we have reaſon to fear, that God will ſtill have a controverſy with us, notwithſtanding all our noiſe and zeal about religion.

This is the true, this is the only courſe to appeaſe the indignation of God, and to draw down his favour and bleſſing upon a poor diſtracted and gaſping nation. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

I have but one word more, and that is to put you preſently upon the practice of one of theſe duties that I have been perſuading you to, and that is *mercy*, and *alms to the poor.* If what I have already ſaid, have had its effect upon you, I need not uſe any other arguments; if it have not, I have hardly the heart to uſe any. I ſhall only put you in mind again, that God values this above all our external devotion, *he will have mercy rather than ſacrifice*; that this is the way to find mercy with God, and to have our prayers ſpeed in heaven; and without this, all our faſting and humiliation ſignifies nothing. And to this purpoſe I will only read to you thoſe plain and perſuaſive words of the prophet, which do ſo fully declare unto us the whole duty of this day, and particularly urge us to this of charity, *Iſa.* lviii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. *Is it ſuch a faſt that I have choſen? a day for a man to afflict his ſoul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulruſh, and to ſpread ſackcloth and aſhes under him? Wilt thou call this a faſt, and an acceptable day unto the Lord? Is not this the faſt that I have choſen? to looſe the bands of wickedneſs, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are caſt out to thy houſe? when thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own fleſh? Then ſhall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy ſalvation ſhall ſpring forth ſpeedily, and thy righteouſneſs ſhall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord ſhall be thy rereward. Then thou ſhalt call, and the Lord ſhall anſwer; thou ſhalt cry, and he ſhall ſay, here I am.*

SERMON XLIX.

Inſtituted Religion not intended to undermine Natural.

MATTHEW ix. 13.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice.

ONE of the moſt ſucceſsful attempts that have been made upon religion, by the Devil and his inſtruments, hath been by ſetting the laws of God at variance with themſelves, and by daſhing the ſeveral parts of religion, and the two tables of the law againſt one another, to break all in pieces; and under a pretence of advancing that part of religion which is *inſtituted* and *revealed*, to undermine and deſtroy that which is *natural*, and of primary obligation.

To manifeſt and lay open the miſchievous conſequences of this deſign, I ſhall at this time (by God's aſſiſtance) endeavour to make out theſe *two* things.

Firſt, That *natural* religion is the foundation of all *inſtituted* and *revealed* religion.

Secondly, That no *revealed* or *inſtituted* religion was ever deſigned to take away the obligation of *natural* duties, but to confirm and eſtabliſh them.

And to this purpoſe, I have choſen theſe words of our Saviour for the foundation of my following diſcourſe; *but go ye and learn, what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.* The occaſion of which words was briefly this; the *Phariſees* found fault with him for keeping company, and eating with *publicans* and *ſinners.* He owns the thing which they objected to him, and endeavours to vindicate himſelf from any crime or fault in ſo doing; and that theſe two ways.

1. By telling them, that it was allow'd to a phyſician, and proper for his office and profeſſion, to converſe with the ſick, in order to their cure and recovery. He may abſtain, if he pleaſeth, from the converſation of others; but the ſick have need of him, and are his proper care, and his buſineſs and employment lies among them; *he ſaid unto them, they that be whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick; I came not to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance*; they who were already good, needed not to be call'd upon to amend and reform their lives; and they that were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, as the *Phariſees* were, and ſo confident that they were ſound and whole, would not admit of a phyſician, and thereby render'd themſelves incapable of cure; and therefore he did not apply himſelf to them; but to the publicans and ſinners, who were acknowledg'd on all hands, both by themſelves and others, to be bad men; ſo that it could not be deny'd to be the proper work of a ſpiritual phyſician to converſe with ſuch perſons.

2. By endeavouring to convince them of their ignorance of the true nature of religion, and of the rank and order of the ſeveral duties thereby required; *but go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy and not ſacrifice*; which ſaying is quoted by him out of the Prophet *Hoſea*, chap. vi. 6. *I deſired mercy, and not ſacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings*; which text our Saviour cites and applies upon two ſeveral occaſions; the conſidering and comparing of which, will give full light to the true meaning of it.

The firſt is here in the text upon occaſion of the *Phariſees* finding fault with him, for converſing with *Publicans* and *ſinners*; the other is, *Matth.* xii. 7. where the *Phariſees* blaming the diſciples of our Saviour for plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, our Saviour tells them, *if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs*; that is, if they had underſtood the true nature of religion, and what duties of it are chiefly and in the firſt place to be regarded, they would not have been ſo forward to cenſure this action of his diſciples.

So that the plain meaning of this ſaying is this, that in comparing the parts of religion and the obligation of duties together, thoſe duties which are of *moral* and *natural* obligation are moſt valued by God, and ought to take place of thoſe which are *poſitive and ritual. I will have mercy and not ſacrifice*, that is, *rather than ſacrifice*, according to the true meaning of this *Hebrew* phraſe, which is to be underſtood in a comparative ſenſe, as is evident from the text itſelf, in *Hoſea*, *I deſired mercy, and not ſacrifice; and the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings*; if they cannot be obſerved together, let *ſacrifice* be neglected, and the work of *mercy* be done.

And the reaſon of this ſeems very plain; becauſe *ſhewing mercy*, or *doing good* in any kind is a prime inſtance of thoſe *moral* duties, which do *naturally* and *perpetually* oblige; but *ſacrifice* is an inſtance of *poſitive* and *ritual* obſervances, and one of the chief of the kind: ſo that when *moral* duties, and *ritual* obſervances come in competition, and do claſh with one another, the obſervation of a *rite*, or *poſitive inſtitution*, is to give way to a *moral* duty; and it is no ſin in that caſe to neglect the obſervation of ſuch a *rite*, yea though it were commanded and appointed by God himſelf. And though this may ſeem to be a breach of the *letter* of the law; yet it is according to the true *mind* and *meaning* of the law; it being a tacit condition implied in all laws of a *ritual* and *poſitive* nature, *provided the obſervance of them be not to the hindrance and prejudice of any duty, which is of a higher and better nature*; in that caſe the obligation of it does for that time give way and is ſuſpended.

And this will appear to be the true meaning of this rule, by comparing more particularly the inſtances to which our Saviour applies it. His diſciples paſſing through the corn on the ſabbath day, and being hungry, pluckt the ears and did eat; this our Saviour doth juſtify to be no breach of the law of the Sabbath; becauſe in that caſe, and in ſuch circumſtances, it did not oblige: for the diſciples being call'd to attend upon our Saviour, to be inſtructed by him in the things which concern'd the kingdom of God, that is, in the doctrine of the Goſpel, which they were to publiſh to the world, this attendance hindred them from making neceſſary proviſions againſt the Sabbath, they, in obedience to their maſter, being intent upon a better work; but that they might not ſtarve, the neceſſities of nature muſt be provided for; and therefore it was fit, that the law of the *Sabbath*, which was but *poſitive* and *ritual*, ſhould give way to an act of *mercy and ſelf-preſervation*; *if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs.*

And the reaſon is the ſame as to any *inſtrumental* part of religion, by which I mean any thing which may be a means to promote piety and goodneſs; as prayer, hearing the word of God, keeping good company, and avoiding bad; the duties of this kind, our Saviour here in the text (where he likewiſe applies this rule,) compares with *moral* duties. To avoid the company of vitious and wicked perſons, is a good means to preſerve men from the contagion of their vices, and was always eſteemed a duty among prudent men, both Jews and Heathens, and is no wiſe diſallow'd by our Saviour: but yet not ſo a duty, as to hinder a greater duty, nor ſo ſtrictly and perverſely to be inſiſted upon, as if one ought not to converſe with bad men in any caſe, or upon any account, no not for ſo great and good an end as to reclaim them from their vices. In this caſe we ought to conſider, that our firſt and higheſt obligation is to *moral* duties, comprehended under *the love of God and our neighbour*; among which one of the chief is to do good to men, and to ſhew mercy and pity to thoſe that are in miſery; and the greateſt good that one man can do to another, is to be inſtrumental to reclaim him from the evil and error of his way; becauſe this is *to ſave his ſoul from death*; and we cannot imagine that God ever intended, by any rule of *prudence* or *poſitive* conſtitution of the Jewiſh law, ſo to forbid their accompanying with bad and ſcandalous men, that it ſhould be unlawful to converſe with them in order to their recovery and amendment; *go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice.*

And St. *Paul* was of the ſame mind in the precepts he gives concerning avoiding the company of ſcandalous Chriſtians, 2 *Theſſ.* iii. 14, 15. *And if any man obey not our word by this epiſtle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be aſhamed*; *yet count him not as an enemy, but admoniſh him as a brother.* St. *Paul* qualifies his precept, leſt Chriſtians ſhould miſtake it, and fall into the *Jewiſh* extreme, not to converſe with thoſe whom they eſteem'd ſcandalous and wicked, upon any account whatſoever, no not in order to their amendment and reformation. The bond of intimacy and friendſhip with bad men ought to be broken, and yet the bond of common humanity may be as ſtrong as ever. It is one thing to diſcountenance bad men, to bring them to ſhame, and a ſenſe of their fault; and quite another thing to abandon them to ruin; and even in caſe of notorious hereſy, or wickedneſs of life, it is one thing to cut them off from the ſociety and communion of Chriſtians; and quite another, to cut them off from human ſociety, to cut their throats, and to extirpate them out of the world.

And yet the matter was carried thus far by the furious zeal of the Jews, when Chriſtianity firſt appear'd in the world; they thought that no mercy in ſuch caſes was the beſt that could be done, and the beſt ſacrifice that could be offered to Almighty God; and this pattern hath been ſince, not only cloſely follow'd but out-done by the doctrines and practices of the church of *Rome*; as we have too much reaſon to remember upon * *this day.*

* *Preached* on Nov. 5, 1688.

But to proceed in the farther explication of the text, the meaning whereof in ſhort is this; that the *ritual* and *inſtrumental* parts of religion, and all laws and duties concerning them, are of leſs value and eſteem with God, than thoſe which are of a *moral* nature, eſpecially the great duties and offices of *piety* and *humanity*, of *the love of God* and *of our neighbour*. And if we conſider the matter well, we ſhall ſee the reaſon of it to be very plain; becauſe *natural* and *moral* duties are approved of God, for themſelves and for their own ſake, upon account of their own *natural* and *intrinſical* goodneſs; but the *ritual* and *inſtrumental* parts of religion are only pleaſing to God in order to theſe, and ſo far as they tend to beget and promote them in us; they are not *naturally* good in themſelves, but are *inſtituted* and *appointed* by God for the ſake of the other; and therefore great reaſon there is that they ſhould be ſubordinate, and give way to them, when they come in competition with one another.

For this is a known rule, which takes place in all laws, *that laws of leſs importance ſhould give way to thoſe that are of greater*; *quoties leges ex circumſtantiâ colliduntur, ita ut utraque ſervari non poteſt, ſervanda eſt lex potior:* "Whenever two laws happen "to be in ſuch circumſtances as to claſh with one another, ſo that both of them can"not be obſerv'd, that law which is better and of greater conſequence is to be kept." And *Tully* gives much the ſame rule in this matter. "In comparing of laws (ſays he) "we are to conſider which law is moſt uſeful, and juſt, and reaſonable to be obſerv'd."

From whence it will follow, that when two laws, or more, or how many ſoever they be, cannot be obſerv'd, becauſe they claſh with one another; *ea maximè conſervanda putetur, quæ ad maximas res pertinere videatur:* "It is reaſonable that that law ſhould "be obſerved, which is of greateſt moment and concernment."

By what hath been ſaid, we may learn what is the meaning of this ſaying, which our Saviour more than once cites out of the Prophet, *I will have mercy and not ſacrifice.*

From the words thus explained, I ſhall take occaſion to proſecute the *two* propoſitions which I mentioned before; namely,

Firſt, That *natural* religion is the foundation of *inſtituted* and *revealed* religion.

Secondly, That no *inſtituted* religion was ever deſign'd to take away the obligation of *natural* duties; but is intended to eſtabliſh and confirm them. And both theſe are ſufficiently grounded in the reaſon of our Saviour's diſcourſe from this rule, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.*

I. That *natural* religion is the foundation of *inſtituted* and *revealed* religion; and all *revealed* religion does ſuppoſe, and take for granted, the clear and undoubted principles and precepts of *natural* religion, and builds upon them. By *natural* religion, I mean obedience to the *natural law,* and the performance of ſuch duties as *natural light,* without any *expreſs* and *ſupernatural revelation,* doth dictate to men. Theſe lie at the bottom of all religion, and are the great and fundamental duties which God requires of all mankind; as, that we ſhould love God, and behave ourſelves reverently towards him; that we ſhould believe his revelations; and teſtify our dependence upon him, by imploring his aid and direction in all our neceſſities and diſtreſſes; and acknowledge our obligations to him for all the bleſſings and benefits which we receive; that we ſhould moderate our appetites, in reference to the pleaſures and enjoyments of this world, and uſe them temperately and chaſtly; that we ſhould be juſt and upright in all our dealings with one another; true to our word, and faithful to our truſt; and in all our words and actions obſerve that equity towards others, which we deſire they ſhould uſe towards us; that we ſhould be kind, and charitable, merciful and compaſſionate one towards another; ready to do good to all, and apt not only to pity, but to relieve them in their miſery and neceſſity. Theſe, and ſuch like, are thoſe which we call *moral* duties; and they are of *eternal* and *perpetual* obligation, becauſe they do *naturally* oblige, without any *particular* and *expreſs revelation* from God. And theſe are the foundation of *revealed* and *inſtituted* religion, and all *revealed* religion does ſuppoſe them, and build upon them; for all *revelation* from God, ſuppoſeth us to be *men,* and alters nothing of thoſe duties to which we were *naturally obliged* before. And this will clearly appear if we conſider theſe *three* things;

Firſt, That the ſcripture every where ſpeaks of theſe, as the main and fundamental duties of the *Jewiſh* religion.

Secondly, That no *inſtituted* ſervice of God, no *poſitive* part of religion, was ever acceptable to him, when theſe were neglected.

Thirdly, That the great deſign of the *chriſtian* religion, was to reſtore and reinforce the practice of the *natural* law.

1. That the ſcripture every where ſpeaks of theſe as the main and fundamental duties of the *Jewiſh* religion. When our Saviour was aſk'd *which was the firſt and great commandment of the law*; he anſwer'd, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy ſtrength; and thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* One would have expected he would have given quite another anſwer, and have pitched upon ſome of thoſe things which were ſo much magnified among the *Jews,* and which they laid ſo much weight upon; that he ſhould have inſtanced in *ſacrifice,* or *circumciſion,* or the law of the *Sabbath:* but he overlooks all theſe as inconſiderable in compariſon, and inſtances only in thoſe two great heads of moral duty, *the love of God, and our neighbour*; which are of *natural* and *perpetual* obligation, and comprehend under them all other *moral* duties.

And theſe are thoſe which our Saviour calls *the law and the Prophets,* and which he ſays *he came not to deſtroy, but to fulfil,* Matt. v. 17, 18, 19, 20. *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the Prophets. I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil: for verily I ſay unto you, 'till heaven and earth paſs, one jot or one tittle ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the law till all be fulfilled. Whoſoever therefore ſhall break one of theſe leaſt commandments, and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be call'd the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven;* *but*

but whoſoever ſhall do and teach them, the ſame ſhall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I ſay unto you, that except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.

That our Saviour doth not here ſpeak of the *judicial* or *ceremonial* law of the *Jews*, but of the duties of the *moral* law, will, I think, be very plain, from theſe following conſiderations.

Firſt, That the *judicial* or *ceremonial* laws of the *Jews* were to *paſs away*, and did ſo, not long after; but this law which our Saviour ſpeaks of, was to be *perpetual*, and *immutable*; for he tells us, *that heaven and earth ſhould paſs away, but one jot or one tittle of* this *law ſhould not paſs.*

Secondly, The obſervation of the law our Saviour ſpeaks of, conſiſted in ſuch things as the Scribes and Phariſees neglected; for he tells his diſciples, upon this occaſion, *that except their righteouſneſs did exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, they ſhould in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* But now the Scribes and Phariſees were the moſt accurate and punctual people in the world, in obſerving the precepts of the *judicial* and *ceremonial* law; they were ſo far from taking away any thing from theſe obſervances, that they had added to them, and enlarg'd them, by innumerable traditions of their own; ſo exact were they, that they would *pay tithe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin*, as our Saviour obſerves; but then they were extremely defective in *moral* duties; they were unnatural to their parents, and would pretend that their eſtates were conſecrated to God, that under this pretence of *poſitive* religion, they might excuſe themſelves from a *natural* duty, and let their parents ſtarve for God's ſake; they were covetous, and unjuſt, and *devoured widows houſes*; in a word, our Saviour tells us, they neglected *the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and the love of God, and keeping faith with men*; ſo that it is in theſe things, that our Saviour means, that *our righteouſneſs muſt exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, viz.* in the practice of *moral* duties, which were neglected by them; and conſequently 'tis the moral law which our Saviour came to confirm and eſtabliſh.

Thirdly, If we conſider the inſtances which our Saviour gives in his following diſcourſe, by which we may beſt judge what he means. He inſtances in *murder*, and *adultery*, and *perjury*, which are undoubtedly forbidden by the *natural* law; and then he inſtances in ſeveral permiſſions which were indulged to them for the hardneſs of their hearts, but yet did intrench upon the dictates of right reaſon, and the firſt and original conſtitution of things; as the permiſſion of *divorce* upon every ſlight occaſion, and of *revenge*, and *retaliation of injuries.*

Fourthly, If we conſider that by *the law and the Prophets*, our Saviour means that which was principally deſigned and ultimately intended by them; which was the obſervation of *moral* duties; which as they were written in the two tables by the immediate finger of God himſelf, ſo are chiefly inculcated by the Prophets. And ſo we find this phraſe of *the law and the Prophets* elſewhere uſed by our Saviour, when he mentions that great rule of equity, that *we ſhould do to others as we would have them do to us*, Matth. vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them: for this is the law and the Prophets.* But how was *this the law and the Prophets*, when this rule was never ſo much as mentioned in either? our Saviour means, that this is the foundation of all thoſe duties of *juſtice* and *mercy*, which are ſo much inculcated in *the law and the Prophets.*

So that our Saviour makes the obſervation of *moral* duties to be the principal deſign of the *Jewiſh* law, and as it were the foundation of it, and therefore he calls *moral* duties, τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, *the weightier matters of the law*, Matth. xxiii. 23. *But ye* (ſays he to the Scribes and Phariſees) *have neglected the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and fidelity.* The Scribes and Phariſees buſied themſelves chiefly about *ritual* obſervances; but our Saviour tells them, that *thoſe other* were the moſt conſiderable and important duties of the law, and lay at the bottom of the *Jewiſh* religion. And much the ſame enumeration the prophet makes, where he compares *ſacrifices* and theſe *moral* duties together, Mic. vi. 6, 7, 8. *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? ſhall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul? he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly*

bly with thy God? he had required *ſacrifices*, but had no regard to them in compariſon with theſe.

II. No *inſtituted* ſervice of God, no *poſitive* part of religion whatſoever, was ever acceptable to God, when *moral* duties were neglected; nay, ſo far from being acceptable to him, that he rejects them with diſdain and abhorrence. To this purpoſe there are almoſt innumerable paſſages in the prophets, *Iſa.* i. 11, &c. *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? when ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? bring no more vain oblations; incenſe is an abomination to me; the new moons and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting; and when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.* What is the reaſon of all this? becauſe they were defective in the *moral* duties of religion; ſo it follows; *your hands are full of blood; waſh ye, make ye clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well; ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow; come now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord*; implying that till they had reſpect to *moral* duties, all their *external* worſhip and *ſacrifices* ſignified nothing. And ſo likewiſe, *Iſa.* lxvi. 3. he tells them that nothing could be more abominable than their *ſacrifices*, ſo long as they allowed themſelves in wicked practices; *he that killeth an ox is as if he ſlew a man; he that ſacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered ſwine's blood; and he that burneth incenſe, as if he bleſſed an idol; yea, they have choſen their own ways, and their ſoul delighteth in their abominations.* And to mention but one text more out of the old Teſtament, *Jer.* vii. 4, 5. *Truſt ye not in lying words, ſaying, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are theſe. Throughly amend your ways and your doings, throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; oppreſs not the ſtranger, the fatherleſs, and the widow, and ſhed not innocent blood.* If they did not practiſe *theſe* duties, and forbear *thoſe* ſins, all the reverence for the *temple* and the *worſhip of God* ſignifies nothing. You ſee in the *Jewiſh* religion what it was that was acceptable to God for its ſelf and its own ſake, *viz.* the practice of *moral* duties; and that all *inſtituted* religion, that did not promote and further *theſe*, or was deſtitute of them, was abominable to God. And under the goſpel our Saviour prefers a *moral* duty before any *gift* we can offer to God, and will have it to take place, *Mat.* v. 23, 24. *If thou bring thy gift unto the altar, and there remembreſt that thy brother hath ought againſt thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, firſt be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

But it ſhould ſeem by this, and what hath been ſaid before, that God prefers goodneſs and righteouſneſs to men, before his own worſhip: and obedience to the precepts of the *ſecond* table, before obedience to thoſe of the *firſt*.

But this does but *ſeem* ſo; all that can be collected from this paſſage of our Saviour, or any thing that hath been already ſaid, are only theſe *two* things.

1. That God prefers the practice of the *moral* duties of the *ſecond* table, before any *inſtituted* worſhip, ſuch as ſacrifice was; and before obedience to the laws of religion, which are meerly *poſitive*, tho' they do immediately concern the worſhip of God.

2. That if we neglect the duties of the *ſecond* table, of *goodneſs* and *righteouſneſs* towards men, God will not accept of our obedience to the precepts of the *firſt*, nor of any act of *religious worſhip* that we can perform. This our Saviour means when he ſays, *leave there thy gift before the altar, firſt be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift*; intimating, that ſo long as we bear a revengeful mind towards our brethren, God will not accept of any *gift* or *ſacrifice* that we can offer to him; or indeed of any act of *religious worſhip* that we can perform.

Thirdly, The great deſign of the *chriſtian* religion is to reſtore and reinforce the practice of the *natural* law, or, which is all one, of *moral* duties; and therefore our Saviour begins his firſt ſermon, by promiſing *bleſſedneſs* to the practice of *theſe* duties; of *purity*, and *meekneſs*, and *righteouſneſs*, and *peaceableneſs*, and *mercifulneſs*, and *patience* and *ſubmiſſion* to the will of God under perſecutions and ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake; and tells us (as I ſhew'd before) that he came not to releaſe men from the practice of *theſe* duties, but to oblige them thereto more effectually; and that as theſe were *the law and the prophets*, that is, the main duties and the foundation of the *Jewiſh* religion, ſo were they much more to be ſo of the *Chriſtian*. This the ſcriptures of the new teſtament do every where declare to be the great deſign of the goſpel, and the chriſtian

tian religion, to inſtruct us in theſe duties and to engage us effectually to the practice of them. In that known and excellent text, *Tit.* ii. 11, 12. *The grace of God* (which is in and by the doctrine of the goſpel) *hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* And herein St. *James* tells us, the true nature, and the force and virtue of the chriſtian religion doth conſiſt, *James* i. 27. *Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and the widows in their affliction, and to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world.* And *chap.* iii. 17. *The wiſdom which is from above* (that is, that heavenly and divine knowledge reveal'd to us by the goſpel) hath theſe properties, and is apt to poduce theſe effects; *it is firſt pure, and then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy, and of good fruits.*

And the planting of theſe diſpoſitions in us is that which the ſcripture calls *the new creature*, and *the image of God*, *Eph.* iv. 20, *&c.* The Apoſtle ſpeaking there of the vices and luſts wherein the Gentiles liv'd, tells Chriſtians that *they* were otherwiſe inſtructed by the goſpel; *but you have not ſo learned Chriſt, if ſo be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus, that ye put off concerning the former converſation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful luſts, and be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*, or (as the words perhaps may be better render'd) *in the holineſs of truth*; for it immediately follows, *wherefore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth with his neighbour.*

And this is that which the Apoſtle elſewhere makes to be *all in all* in the chriſtian religion. *In Chriſt Jeſus, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but a new creature*, Gal. vi. 15. Which the Apoſtle in the chapter before expreſſeth thus; *in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but faith which worketh* (or is inſpired) *by charity.* And yet more expreſly, 1 *Cor.* vii. 19. *Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* By the comparing of which texts, it appears, that the main thing in Chriſtianity is the practice of *moral* duties, and this is *the new creature*, and this the proper effect of the chriſtian faith, to produce theſe virtues in us. And indeed the great deſign of the chriſtian religion and every thing in it, of the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, of the pardon of our ſins and juſtification in his blood, of all the promiſes and threatnings of the goſpel, and of the aſſiſtance therein promiſed, is to engage and encourage, and enable to the practice of *moral* duties.

And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, namely, that *natural* religion is the foundation of *inſtituted* and *revealed* religion; and all *revealed* religion does ſuppoſe it, and builds upon it. I proceed to the

Second, namely, That no *revealed* and *inſtituted* religion was ever deſigned to take away the obligation of *natural* duties, but was intended to confirm and eſtabliſh them. And this alſo will be evident, if we conſider theſe *three* things.

1. That all *revealed* religion calls men to the practice of *natural* duties. This the *Jewiſh* religion did. The firſt laws which God gave them, and which he diſtinguiſhed from the reſt, by writing them in tables of ſtone with his own finger, were the precepts of the *moral* law. And the great buſineſs of the Prophets whom God rais'd up among them from time to time, was to reprove not ſo much their defects in their *ſacrifices*, and in the duties of *inſtituted* worſhip, as the breach of the *natural* law by their vices and immoralities; and to threaten them with the judgments of God, if they did not reform and amend their faults.

And now under the goſpel, the preceptive part of it is almoſt wholly made up of *moral duties*, namely, thoſe which are comprehended under thoſe *two* great commandments, of the *love of God, and our neighbour.* In the chriſtian religion there is very little that is meerly *poſitive* and *inſtituted*, beſides *the two ſacraments*, and *praying to God in the name and mediation of Jeſus Chriſt.*

2. The moſt perfect revelation that ever God made to mankind (I mean that of the chriſtian religion) doth furniſh us with the beſt helps and advantages for the performance of *moral* duties; it diſcovers our duty more clearly to us; it offers us the greateſt aſſiſtance to enable us to the performance of it; it preſents us with the moſt powerful motives and arguments to engage us thereto; ſo that this revelation of the goſpel is ſo far from weakening the obligation of *natural* duties, that it confirms and ſtrengthens it, and urgeth us more forcibly to the practice of them.

3. The *poſitive* rites and inſtitutions of *revealed* religion are ſo far from intrenching upon the laws of *nature*, that they were always deſign'd to be ſubordinate and ſubſervient to them; and whenever they come in competition, it is the declar'd will of God, that *poſitive inſtitutions* ſhould give way to *natural duties*; and this I have ſhewn to be plainly the meaning of this ſaying in the text, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice.* If circumſtances be ſuch, that one part of religion muſt give place, God will have the *ritual* and *inſtituted* part to give way to that which is *natural* and *moral.*

It is very frequent in ſcripture, when the duties of *natural* religion, and rites of divine *inſtitution* come in competition, to ſlight and diſparage *theſe* in compariſon of *moral* duties, and to ſpeak of them as things which God hath no pleaſure in, and which in compariſon of the other he will hardly own that he hath commanded. *When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands?* Iſa. i. 12. *Thou deſireſt not ſacrifice, thou delighteſt not in burnt-offerings,* Pſal. li. 16. *Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or ten thouſands of rivers of oil? He that ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy?*

But God no where makes any compariſon to the diſadvantage of *natural* duties; he never derogated from *them* in any caſe; he never ſaid *he would have ſuch a thing, and not mercy,* or *that he had rather ſuch a rite of religion ſhould be performed, than that men ſhould do the greateſt good, and ſhew the greateſt charity to one another.* It is no where made a queſtion, *will the Lord be pleaſed that we deal juſtly every man with his neighbour, and ſpeak the truth one to another? that we be kind and tender-hearted, and ready to forgive? that we be willing to diſtribute and give alms to thoſe that are in need?* there is no ſuch queſtion as this put in ſcripture; nay it is poſitive in theſe matters, that *with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed.* I inſtance in this virtue more eſpecially of *kindneſs* and *compaſſion,* becauſe it is one of the prime inſtances of *moral* duties; as *ſacrifice* is put for all the *ritual* nnd *inſtituted* part of religion, and this diſpoſition of mind our Saviour makes the root of all *moral* duties; *love is the fulfilling of the law*; and the Apoſtle ſpeaks of it as the great end and ſcope of the *goſpel*; *the end of the commandment is charity.* And this temper and diſpoſition of mind he advanceth above *knowledge,* and *faith,* and *hope*; *the greateſt of theſe is charity*; and without *this,* he will not allow a man to be any thing in Chriſtianity; *this* he makes our higheſt perfection and attainment, and that which abides and remains in the future ſtate; *charity never fails.*

This our Saviour moſt effectually recommends to us, both in his doctrine, and by his example; *this* he preſſeth as a peculiar law of his religion, and the proper mark and character of a diſciple. *This* he requires us to exerciſe towards thoſe who practiſe the contrary towards us; *to love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us.* And of *this* he hath given us the greateſt example that ever was; *when we were enemies to him,* he loved us ſo as hardly ever any man did his *friend,* ſo as *to lay down his life for us*; and he inſtituted the Sacrament for a memorial of his love to mankind, and to put us in mind how we ought to love one another.

And now the application of what hath been ſaid upon this argument, to the occaſion of *this* day, is very obvious, and there are *two* very natural inferences from it.

Firſt, From what hath been ſaid upon this argument, it plainly appears what place *natural* and *moral* duties ought to have in the chriſtian religion; and of all *natural* duties, *mercy,* and *goodneſs.* *This* is ſo primary a duty of human nature, ſo great and conſiderable a part of religion, that all *poſitive inſtitutions* muſt give way to it; and nothing of that kind can cancel the obligation of it, nor juſtify the violation of this great and *natural* law. Our bleſſed Saviour in his religion hath declared nothing to the prejudice of it; but on the contrary hath heightened our obligation to it, as much as is poſſible, by telling us that *the Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them.*

So that *they know not what manner of ſpirit they are of* who will *kill men to do God ſervice*; and to advance his cauſe and religion in the world, will break through all obligations of *nature,* and *civil ſociety,* and diſturb the peace and happineſs of mankind.

Nor did our Saviour by any thing in his religion deſign to releaſe men from the obligation of *natural* and *civil* duties. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the *Pope* but yet he depos'd none of the princes of this world, nor did abſolve their ſubjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their oppoſition to his religion; he aſſumed no ſuch power to himſelf (no not *in ordine ad ſpiritualia*) nor, that ever we read of, did he give it to any other. Whence then comes his *pretended vicar* to have this authority? And yet the horrid attempt of *this* day was firſt deſign'd, and afterwards carried on, in proſecution of the Pope's *Bull* of excommunication, and was not ſo much the effect of the deſpair and diſcontent of that party here in *England*, as the natural conſequence of their doctrines of *extirpating hereticks* and *depoſing Kings*, and *abſolving ſubjects from their allegiance to them.*

No zeal for any *poſitive* inſtitution in religion can juſtify the violation of the *natural* law, the precepts whereof are of *primary* and *indiſpenſable* obligation. The *Pope's ſupremacy* is not ſo clear as the duty of *obedience to civil government*; nor is *tranſubſtantiation* ſo plainly reveal'd in ſcripture, as it is both in nature and ſcripture that we ſhould *do no murder.* And yet how many thouſands have been put to death, becauſe they could not underſtand *this hard word*, and believe *this impoſſible thing!* And yet if *the ſupremacy of the Pope* were clearly of divine right, and the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation* as plain as the inſtitution of the ſacrament: yet theſe being but *poſitive* matters in religion, there would be no reaſon to *kill men* for not underſtanding and believing theſe things; nay it would be contrary to religion to do it; becauſe the law of *mercy* and *humanity*, which is the law of *nature*, ought not to be violated for the promoting of any *poſitive inſtitution*; and God hath plainly ſaid, that *he will have mercy rather than ſacrifice*; yea rather than the *ſacrifice of the maſs*, if it were what they pretend it is, *the offering of the natural body and blood of Chriſt*; becauſe it would be needleſs: for propitiation of ſin being once made by *Chriſt's offering himſelf once for all* upon the croſs; *there needs no more ſacrifice for ſin.* Nay, I will go further yet; I had rather never adminiſter the ſacrament, nor ever receive it, than take away any man's life about it; becauſe the ſacrament is but a *poſitive* rite and inſtitution of the chriſtian religion, and God prefers *mercy*, which is a duty of *natural* religion, before any *rite* or *inſtitution* whatſoever. Beſides, that all acts of malice and cruelty are directly contrary to the particular nature and deſign of this bleſſed ſacrament, which is to commemorate the ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſakes, and to give us an example of the greateſt love that ever was, and thereby to excite us to the imitation of it.

2. What hath been ſaid gives us a right notion and character of that church and religion, which prefers the *poſitive* rites and *inſtitutions* of religion, and the obſervance of them, to thoſe duties which are of *natural* and *eternal* obligation, *mercy* and *goodneſs*, *fidelity* and *juſtice*; and which for the ſake of a *pretended article* of religion, or *rite of worſhip*, (which if it were certain that they were *revealed*, and *inſtituted* by God, are yet merely *poſitive*) will *break the greateſt of God's commandments, and teach men ſo.*

It is too plain to be deny'd, that the principles and precepts of *natural* religion were never ſo effectually undermin'd, and the *morality* of the chriſtian religion never ſo intolerably corrupted and debauched, by any thing that ever had the face of religion in the world, as by the allowed doctrines and practices of the church of *Rome*, and this out of a blind and furious zeal for ſome imaginary doctrines and rites of the chriſtian religion, which at the beſt are of mere *poſitive inſtitution*, and of the ſame rank among *Chriſtians*, that *ſacrifices* were in the *Jewiſh* religion. For which we need go no further for an inſtance, than in the occaſion of *this* day's ſolemnity; upon which day, (about fourſcore years ago) there was deſign'd *a mighty ſacrifice* indeed, *the greateſt and richeſt burnt-offering* that ever was pretended to be offer'd up to Almighty God, by thoſe of any religion whatſoever; not *the blood of bulls and goats*, but *of king, and princes, and nobles*, more in value than *thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil*; than *all the beaſts of the foreſt, and the cattle upon a thouſand hills.*

Here was a *prodigious ſacrifice* indeed; but where was *mercy?* the thing God chiefly deſires, and which above all other things is acceptable to him; no *mercy* not even to thoſe of their own religion, whom theſe *nice* and *tender Caſuiſts*, after a ſolemn debate of the caſe, had reſolv'd to involve in the ſame common deſtruction with the reſt; rather *no mercy*, than that *this ſacrifice* which their *mad zeal* had prompted them to, ſhould be omitted.

To conclude, They that can do ſuch *inhuman* things, and think them to be *religion*, do not underſtand the nature of it, but had need to be taught *the firſt rudiments of natural religion*; that *natural duties* are not to be violated upon pretence, no, not for the ſake of *poſitive inſtitutions*; becauſe *natural* religion is the *foundation* of that which is *inſtituted*; and therefore to violate any *natural* duty for the ſake of that which is *inſtituted*, is for religion to undermine and blow up itſelf. Let thoſe who *do ſuch things and teach men ſo, go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice.*

SERMON L.

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

Chriſtianity doth not deſtroy, but perfect the Law of Moses.

Matth. v. 17.

Think not that I am come to deſtroy the Law or the Prophets. I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil.

THERE is no ſaying in the whole Goſpel, which the *Jews* did ſo frequently object to the Chriſtians as this of our bleſſed Saviour, as if his words and actions were plainly repugnant, and contrary to one another: for when it is evident, ſay they, that he took away ſo many ceremonies, purifications, diſtinctions of meats, ſacrifices, judicial laws, and many other things; yet he ſays, *he came not to deſtroy the Law or the Prophets*; ſo that it is plain, that he did throw down the law of *Moſes*, and in ſo doing contradicted his own ſaying, that he did not intend *to deſtroy the Law*. To clear our Saviour's words of this objection, it will be requiſite to conſider the ſcope and deſign of his diſcourſe in this chapter; by which we ſhall fully underſtand the ſenſe and meaning of theſe words in the text.

Our Saviour in this ſermon, (which contains the ſum and ſubſtance of his religion) doth earneſtly recommend to his diſciples and followers, and ſtrictly enjoins the perfect practice of all goodneſs and virtue, declaring to them, that he came to bring in and eſtabliſh that righteouſneſs, which the Jewiſh religion indeed aimed at, but through the weakneſs and imperfection of that diſpenſation, was not able to effect and accompliſh. And to take away all ſuſpicion of a deſign, to contradict the former revelations of God, made to the Jews by *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, or to deſtroy their divine authority, by carrying on a deſign contrary to them, I ſay, to prevent any imagination of this kind, he does here in the text expreſly declare the contrary; *Think not*, &c. intimating that ſome either did, or at leaſt might be apt to ſuſpect, that his deſign was to deſtroy the obligation of the law, and to undermine the authority of *Moſes* and the prophets; to free them from this jealouſy, he declares plainly, that he had no ſuch thought and intention, it was far from him.

I come not to deſtroy, καταλῦσαι, *to abrogate*, or *diſſolve the law*, to encourage men to the breach and violation of it; for the word is of the ſame ſenſe with λῦειν, at the 19th *verſe. Whoſoever ſhall break one of theſe leaſt commandments*; and with καταργῆσαι, *Rom.* iii. 31. νόμον οὖν καταργοῦμεν; *do we then make void the law by faith?* Which is the ſame queſtion with that of the ſame Apoſtle, *Gal.* iii. 21. *Is the law then againſt the promiſes of God?* that is, *are the law and goſpel contrary? do they contradict one another?* So that the meaning of our Saviour's declaration is this, that he was not come to *diſſolve*, and *abrogate*, and *make void* the law or to encourage men to the breach of it; that the precepts of his religion were in no wiſe contrary to thoſe of the law and the Prophets, did not thwart and oppoſe them, or any ways contradict the main deſign and intention of *the Law and the Prophets*; that is, of *the Jewiſh religion*; for ſo *the Law and the Prophets* do frequently ſignify, *Matt.* vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them*; *for this is the Law and the Prophets*; that is, this is the main ſcope and intention of what *your religion* contained *in the Law and the Prophets*, teacheth, concerning your duty to one another. So likewiſe, *Matt.* xxii. 40. *On theſe two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*; that is, this is the ſum of all the duties of religion; to theſe two laws, all that the Jewiſh religion teacheth may be referr'd. *I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil*; to carry on the ſame deſign which was intended by the Jewiſh religion, and to perfect and accompliſh it; to ſupply all the defects and weakneſſes and imperfections of that diſpenſation; this is the plain meaning of this caution and declaration of our Saviour's; *Think not*, &c.

For the clearing of this matter, *viz.* That the deſign of our Saviour's doctrine and religion is not contrary to thoſe former revelations, which God made to the *Jews* by *Moſes* and the *Prophets*; this will evidently appear, whether we conſider the prophecies and predictions of the Old Teſtament, or the laws and precepts therein contained.

Firſt, The prophecies and predictions of the Old Teſtament; our Saviour came not *to contradict* and *overthrow* theſe; but *to fulfil* them. The chief predictions of the Law and the prophets were concerning the *Meſſias*, and his ſpiritual kingdom. In the law it was foretold, *that God would raiſe to them a Prophet like unto Moſes, whom they ought to hear and obey*; *and to him all the Prophets of the Old Teſtament gave witneſs*, foretelling the time of his coming, his extraction, the manner and circumſtances of his birth, the purity and efficacy of his doctrine, the actions and miracles of his life, his paſſion, death and burial, with the particular circumſtances of them, his reſurrection from the dead, and his aſcenſion into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; ſo that this part of *the Law and Prophets* he did *accompliſh* and *fulfil* in a moſt eminent and remarkable manner; all things that the Prophets had foretold concerning the Meſſias, were punctually made good in the perſon, and actions, and ſufferings of our Saviour.

Secondly, As to the laws and precepts of the Jewiſh religion, the doctrine and the laws of Chriſtianity did not claſh with them; nor properly *abrogate* them, and *make them void*, eſpecially as to the *moral* precepts, which were the very life and ſpirit, the ultimate ſcope and deſign of that religion; nay, ſo far was it from doing ſo, that the main and proper intention of Chriſtianity, was to *clear*, and *eſtabliſh* that, which was the main deſign of *the Law and Prophets*, *to perfect the law* in this part, and to *raiſe* and *advance morality* to its higheſt pitch, to ſupply all the defects and imperfections of the Jewiſh religion, and to make men much better than that weak and imperfect inſtitution was able to do. This was the great deſign of Chriſtianity; and it is very probable that our Saviour had a principal, if not a ſole reſpect to the precepts of *the moral law*, when he here ſays, that *he came not to deſtroy the Law and the Prophets*, *but to perfect and fulfil them*; as I ſhall have occaſion by and by to ſhew more at large.

But that we may give a full anſwer to the objection of the *Jews* againſt this ſaying of our Saviour's, I ſhall ſhew that he did not come to *thwart* and *contradict*, and properly to *abrogate* and *make void the Jewiſh law*, in any part of it, neither the *civil* and *judicial*, nor the *ritual* and *ceremonial*, much leſs the *moral* and *natural* precepts of it. This is more than I think to be abſolutely neceſſary, to reconcile this ſaying of our Saviour with the reſt of his doctrine and actions; for tho' he had properly *abrogated the ceremonial law*, and in no ſenſe *fulfill'd it*; yet, notwithſtanding this, it may be true, that *he came not to deſtroy the Law and the Prophets*; that is, to *deſtroy the obligation of moral duties*, which he ſpeaks of in this chapter, and elſewhere declares to be the ultimate ſcope, the ſum and ſubſtance of *the Law and the Prophets*; for if the *ceremonial law* was not deſign'd by God to be *perpetual*, but to give way to *a more perfect diſpenſation*; then our Saviour did no way *thwart* and *contradict the Law and the Prophets*; by *abrogating the ceremonial law*, at that time, when God deſign'd that a period ſhould be put to it. But yet for the fuller ſatisfaction to this objection, I ſhall ſhew that our Saviour did not properly *abrogate* any part of the *Jewiſh law*, no not the *ritual* and *ceremonial* part of it; but did *fulfil it*.

Firſt, Not their *civil* and *judicial* laws. Theſe in the original intention of them, were not laws deſign'd for mankind, but ſuited and fitted to the diſpoſition and temper, the condition and circumſtances of a particular people and nation; to theſe our Saviour taught obedience, and paid it himſelf, and never did any thing contrary to them, nor in the leaſt weaken the obligation of them; but they continu'd in full force, 'till that nation and commonwealth was diſſolved. So that theſe laws were no way impeached or *abrogated* by the chriſtian religion; but they fell for want of a ſubject to exerciſe their power upon, and becauſe the people that were to be governed by them were deſtroyed or diſſipated; and tho' they neither are, nor ever were obligatory to other nations, as given by *Moſes*, and as they were the peculiar laws of a particular nation; yet the natural reaſon and equity of them, ſo far as it concern'd mankind, is duly conſidered and regarded by us, and many of theſe laws are adopted into the laws of moſt chriſtian nations. It is plain then, that this part of the Jewiſh law received no prejudice by Chriſtianity, but continued in full force, ſo long as that nation and commonwealth laſted, which was to be governed by it.

Secondly, As to the *ritual* and *ceremonial* part of the Jewiſh law, which conſiſted in circumciſion, and purifications, and ſacrifices, in diſtinction of meats, and times, and innumerable other rites and obſervances; this was not properly *abrogated* and *made void* by the coming of Chriſt, but *fulfill'd* and *made good* by him. The rites and ceremonies of the law, were the types and ſhadows of thoſe *future good things* which were promis'd under the Goſpel, a kind of rude draught of a better and more perfect inſtitution, which was deſign'd, and at laſt *finiſhed* and *perfected by the* chriſtian religion. This account the Apoſtle gives of the *legal rites and obſervances*, Col. ii. 16, 17. *Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in reſpect of a holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the ſabbath days, which are a ſhadow of things to come, but the body is of Chriſt*; that is, he is the *ſubſtance* and *reality* of all thoſe things, which were *ſhadowed* and *figured* by thoſe *legal obſervances*. And ſo the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* calls the prieſts and ſacrifices of the law, the *examples and ſhadows of heavenly things*, Chap. viii. 5. and ſo Chap. x. 1. *the law having a ſhadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things*; that is, being *but an obſcure type*, and not *a perfect repreſentation* of the bleſſings and benefits of the goſpel, which we now have in *truth* and *reality*. Now reaſon will tell us, that the laws concerning theſe *types* and *ſhadows*, were only to continue till the *ſubſtance* of the things ſignified by them ſhould come, and that they would be of no longer uſe, when *that more perfect inſtitution*, which was figur'd by them, ſhould take place, and then they would expire, and become void of themſelves, becauſe the reaſon and uſe of them ceaſing, they muſt neceſſarily fall.

But they did not expire immediately upon the coming of Chriſt, and therefore he himſelf ſubmitted to theſe laws, ſo long as they continued in force; he was circumciſed, and preſented in the temple, and performed all other rites required by the law, *that firſt covenant* to which theſe laws and ordinances belong'd, continuing in force till the ratification of the *ſecond covenant* by the death of Chriſt, and then theſe laws expir'd, or rather were *fulfill'd*, and had their accompliſhment in the ſacrifice of Chriſt, which made all the ſacrifices and other rites of the Jewiſh religion needleſs, and of no uſe for the future; Chriſt having by this *one ſacrifice of himſelf, perfected for ever them that are ſanctified*, as the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Heb.* x. 14. So that Chriſt did not properly *abrogate* and *repeal* thoſe *ritual* and *ceremonial* laws; but they having continu'd as long as they were deſign'd to do, and there was any uſe of them, they *abated* and *ceaſed* of themſelves.

And that the death of Chriſt was the time of their expiration, becauſe then the *new covenant* took place, St. *Paul* expreſly tells us, *Eph.* ii. 15. *having aboliſht or voided in his fleſh the law of commandments contained in ordinances*; and this, *ver.* 16. he is ſaid to have done *by his croſs*; and more plainly, *Col.* ii. 14. *blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances, which was againſt us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his croſs.*

So that ye ſee that even the *ceremonial* law was not ſo properly *abrogated* by the ſacrifice and death of Chriſt, but rather had its *accompliſhment*, and attain'd its *end*, in the ſacrifice of Chriſt, which by the eternal efficacy of it to the expiation of ſin, and the purifying of our conſciences, hath made all the ſacrifices and waſhings, and other rites of the *ceremonial law*, for ever needleſs and ſuperfluous.

Thirdly, But eſpecially as to the *moral law*, and thoſe precepts which are of *natural* and *perpetual* obligation, our Saviour did not come either to *diſſolve*, or *to leſſen* and *ſlacken* the obligation of them.

And of this I told you our Saviour doth principally, if not ſolely ſpeak here in the text, as will appear to any one that ſhall attentively conſider the ſcope of his diſcourſe. In the beginning of his ſermon he promiſeth bleſſing to thoſe, and thoſe only, who were endow'd with thoſe virtues which are required by the precepts of the *moral* law, or comprehended in them; and then he tells them, that Chriſtians muſt be very eminent and conſpicuous for the practice of them, *ver.* 16. *Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*; and then he cautions them not to entertain any ſuch imaginations, as if he intended to diſſolve the obligation of the law, and to free men from the practice of *moral* duties, which probably ſome might have ſuggeſted againſt him; *think not that I am come to deſtroy the Law and the Prophets*; as if he had ſaid, you cannot entertain any ſuch conceit, if you conſider that the precepts of which I inculcate upon you, and thoſe virtues, the practice whereof I recommend to you, are the ſame which are contain'd *in the Law and the Prophets.* So that I am ſo far from croſſing the main deſign of *the Law and the Prophets*, and taking away the obligation of *moral* duties enjoin'd by the Jewiſh religion, that I come purpoſely to carry on the ſame deſign to *further perfection*, to give *a more perfect and clear law*, and to give *a greater inforcement* and *encouragement* to the practice of *moral* duties; theſe were always the ſum and ſubſtance of religion, the ultimate deſign of *the Law and the Prophets*, and therefore I am ſo far from diſcharging men from the obligation of the *moral* precepts of the *law*, that I come to bind them more ſtrongly upon you. And *verily I ſay unto you*, that is, I ſolemnly declare, *that whoſoever ſhall break one of theſe leaſt Commandments, and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven*; that is, he ſhall in no wiſe enter therein. You think the Scribes and Phariſees very pious and excellent men, and to have attained to a high pitch of righteouſneſs; *but I ſay unto you, that except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no wiſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And then he inſtanceth in ſeveral precepts of *the moral law*, which in the letter of them, eſpecially as they were interpreted by the teachers of the law among the Jews, were very much ſhort of that righteouſneſs and perfection which he now requires of his diſciples and followers. So that his whole diſcourſe is about precepts and obligations of *the moral* law, and not a word concerning the *ritual* and *ceremonial* law; which makes me very prone to think, that our Saviour's meaning in the text is this, that his religion was ſo far from thwarting and oppoſing that which was the main deſign of *the Law and the Prophets*, that is, of the *Jewiſh religion*, that the principal intention of Chriſtianity was to advance the practice of goodneſs and virtue, by ſtrengthening the obligation of *moral* duties, and giving us a more perfect law and rule of life, and offering better arguments and greater encouragements to the obedience of this law. Therefore for the fuller explication and illuſtration of this matter, I ſhall endeavour to clear theſe *three* points.

Firſt, That the main and ultimate deſign of *the Law and the Prophets*, was to engage men to the practice of *moral* duties, that is, of real and ſubſtantial goodneſs.

Secondly, That the law of *Moſes*, or the diſpenſation of the Jewiſh religion, was comparatively very weak and inſufficient to this purpoſe.

Thirdly, That the Chriſtian religion hath ſupplied all the defects, and weakneſſes and imperfections of that diſpenſation. Theſe three particulars will fully clear our Saviour's meaning in this text.

Firſt, That the main and ultimate deſign of *the Law and the Prophets*, was to engage men to the practice of *moral* duties; that is, of real and ſubſtantial goodneſs, conſiſting in thoſe virtues which our Saviour mentions at the beginning of this Sermon; *humility*, and *meekneſs*, and *mercy*, and *righteouſneſs*, and *purity*, and *peaceableneſs*. This our Saviour more than once tells us was the ſum and ſubſtance, the main ſcope and deſign of the whole doctrine of *the Law and the Prophets*, *Matt.* vii. 12. *Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo unto them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.* And *Matt.* xxii. 40. That *the love of God* and *our neighbour*, thoſe *two great commands*, to which all *moral* duties are reduced, are the two great hinges of the Jewiſh religion; *on theſe two hang all the Law and the Prophets.* St. *Paul* calls *love*, *the fulfilling of the whole law*, Rom. xiii. 10. St. *James*, *the perfect and the royal law*, as that which hath a ſovereign influence upon all parts of religion. And therefore the Apoſtle, *Rom.* iii. 21. tells us that this more perfect *righteouſneſs* which was brought in by the Goſpel, or the chriſtian religion, is *witneſſed by the Law and the Prophets.* And indeed the Prophets every where do ſlight and undervalue the *ritual* and *ceremonial* part of religion, in compariſon of the practice of *moral* duties, *Iſa.* i. 11. *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? bring no more vain oblations*; *your new moons and your appointed feaſts my ſoul hateth.* But what then are the things that are acceptable to God? He tells us at the 16th *ver. Waſh ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well*; *ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow.* And by the Prophet *Jeremiah* God tells that people, that the buſineſs of *ſacrifices* was not the thing primarily deſign'd by God, but obedience to the *moral* law; the *ritual* law came in upon occaſion, for the prevention of Idolatry, and by way of condeſcenſion to the temper of that people; and thus *Maimonides* and the learned *Jews* underſtood theſe words, *Jer.* vii. 22, 23. *I ſpake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and ſacrifices*; *but this thing commanded I them, ſaying, obey my voice, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded, and I will be your God; and ye ſhall be my people.* So likewiſe in the Prophet *Hoſea,* God plainly prefers the *moral* before the *ritual* part of religion, as that which was principally deſigned and intended by him, *Hoſ.* vi. 6. *I deſired mercy and not ſacrifice*; *and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings*; but moſt plainly and expreſly, *Mic.* vi. 6. *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, and ten thouſand of rivers of oil? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Theſe it ſeems were the great things which God ſtood upon and required of men even under that imperfect diſpenſation; and theſe are the very things which the chriſtian religion doth ſo ſtrictly enjoin and command; ſo that *this righteouſneſs* which the Goſpel requires, *was witneſſed to by the Law and the Prophets.* I proceed to the

Second point, That the law of *Moſes*, or the diſpenſation of the *Jewiſh* religion, was comparatively very weak, and inſufficient to make men truly good; and for the promoting of real and inward righteouſneſs; it gave laws indeed to this purpoſe, but thoſe not ſo clear and perfect, or at leaſt not ſo clearly underſtood as they are now under the Goſpel; and it made no expreſs promiſes of inward grace, and aſſiſtance, to quicken and ſtrengthen us in the doing of our duty; it made no explicit promiſes of any bleſſing and reward to the doing of our duty beyond this life; ſo that the beſt and moſt powerful arguments and encouragements to obedience, were either wholly wanting, or very obſcurely revealed under this diſpenſation.

And this inſufficiency of the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation, both to our juſtification and ſanctification, to the reconciling of us to God, and the making of us really good, the Apoſtle frequently inculcates in the new Teſtament; St. *Paul,* Acts xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins, and by him all that believe are juſtified, from all thoſe things, from which ye could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes*; and *Rom.* viii. 3. *What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the fleſh*; that is, by reaſon of the carnality of that diſpenſation, conſiſting in the purification of the body, *Gal.* iii. 21. he calls it a law unfit to give life; *If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteouſneſs had been by the law.* And the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews,* Chap. viii. 6, 7, 8, *&c.* finds fault with the diſpenſation of the law, for the lowneſs and meanneſs of its promiſes, being only of temporal good things; and for want of conferring an inward and a powerful principle to enable men to obedience; *but now hath he obtained* (ſpeaking of Chriſt) *a more excellent miniſtry, by how much alſo he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes*; *for if that firſt covenant had been faultleſs, then ſhould no place have been ſought for a ſecond*; and this *ſecond* and *better covenant,* he tells us, was foretold by the prophets of the old Teſtament; *for finding fault with them, he ſaith, behold the days come, ſaith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the houſe of Iſrael, and the houſe of Judah*; *not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers. For this is the covenant which I will make with the houſe of Iſrael after thoſe days, ſaith the Lord, I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.* And *Chap.* x. 1, 4, he ſhews the inefficacy of their ſacrifices for the real expiation of ſin, *the law having* but *a ſhadow of good things to come, and not the lively repreſentation of the things* themſelves, *can never with thoſe ſacrifices which they offer'd year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect*; *for it is not poſſible that the blood of bulls and goats ſhould take away ſins.*

I ſhould now have proceeded to the *third* particular; namely, that the chriſtian religion hath ſupplied all the defects and weakneſs and imperfection of the Jewiſh diſpenſation; but that I ſhall not now enter upon, but make one plain inference from the ſubſtance of what I have already diſcourſed upon this argument.

If our Saviour *came not to diſſolve* and *looſen* the obligation of *moral* duties, but to *confirm* and *eſtabliſh* it, and to *inforce* and *bind* the practice of theſe duties *more ſtrongly* upon us, then they do widely and wilfully miſtake the deſign of Chriſtianity, who teach that *it diſchargeth men from the obligation of the moral law,* which is the fundamental and avow'd principle of the *Antimonian* doctrine, but directly contrary to this declaration of our Saviour in the text, *that he came not to deſtroy the Law and the Prophets, but* to perfect and *fulfil them*; (for to take away the obligation of a law, is plainly to *deſtroy* and *make it void*;) and contrary to the Apoſtle's ſolemn reſolution of this matter, *Rom.* iii. 31. *Do we then make void the law through faith?* that is, does the Goſpel deſtroy and take away the obligation of the law? *God forbid, yea we eſtabliſh the law*; the chriſtian religion is ſo far from deſigning or doing any ſuch thing, that it gives new ſtrength and force to it.

But ſurely they that teach this doctrine, did never duly conſider that terrible threatening of our Saviour after the text, which ſeems to be ſo directly levell'd at them; *Whoſoever ſhall break one of theſe leaſt commandments, and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be call'd the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven*; for how can men more effectually *teach* the violation, not only of the *leaſt*, but of *the greateſt* of God's commandments, than by declaring that *the Goſpel hath ſet men free from the obligation of the moral law?* which is in effect to ſay, that Chriſtians may act contrary to all the duties of *morality*, that is, do the moſt impious things in the world, without any offence againſt God, and notwithſtanding this, continue to be his children, and highly in the favour of God.

And all the ſecurity they have againſt this impious conſequence, is that weak and ſlender pretence, "that gratitude and love to God will preſerve them from making this "ill uſe of the grace of the Goſpel, and oblige them to abſtain from ſin, and to en-"deavour to pleaſe God as much as any law could do." But then they do not conſider the nonſenſe of this; for there can be no ſuch thing as *ſin*, if the obligation of the law be taken away, for *where there is no law, there* can be *no tranſgreſſion*, as the Apoſtle and common reaſon likewiſe tells us; ſo that the law being remov'd and taken away, all actions become indifferent, and one thing is not more *a ſin*, or *offence againſt God* than another. And what then is it they mean that gratitude will oblige men to, or preſerve them from? when there can be no ſuch thing as *ſin* or *duty*, as *pleaſing* or *offending* God, if there be no *law* to oblige us to the one, or reſtrain us from the other.

And what is, if *this* be not, *to turn the grace of God into wantonneſs*, and to make *chriſtian liberty a cloke* for all ſorts of ſins? A man cannot do a greater deſpite to the chriſtian religion, nor take a more effectual courſe to bring it into contempt, and to make it to be hiſs'd out of the world, than to repreſent it as a lewd and licentious doctrine, which gives men a perfect diſcharge from all the duties of *morality*, and obligeth them only *to believe confidently, that Chriſt hath purchaſed for them a liberty to do what they will, and that upon theſe terms, and no other, they are ſecured of the favour of God in this world, and eternal ſalvation in the other.* This is the ſum and the plain reſult of the *Antimonian* doctrine, the moſt pernicious *hereſy*, and moſt directly deſtructive of the great end and deſign of Chriſtianity, that ever yet was broach'd in the world. But *ye have not ſo learned Chriſt, if ſo be ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus, that ye put off concerning your former converſation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful luſts, and that ye be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs, and true holineſs.*

SERMON

SERMON LI.

The ſecond Sermon on this Text.

Chriſtianity doth not deſtroy, but perfect the Law of Moses.

Matth. V. 17.

Think not that I am come to deſtroy the Law or the Prophets. I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil.

I Have conſider'd this ſaying of our Saviour's with reſpect to *the moral law*, and thoſe precepts which are of *natural* and *perpetual* force, and that our Saviour did not come either to *diſſolve* or *looſen* the obligation of them; for the illuſtration of which, I propounded to clear theſe *three* points.

Firſt, That the main and ultimate deſign of *the Law and the Prophets*, was to engage men to the practice of *moral* duties, that is, of real and ſubſtantial goodneſs.

Secondly, That *the law of Moſes*, or the diſpenſation of the Jewiſh religion, was comparatively very weak and inſufficient to make men truly good, and ineffectual to promote and reward real righteouſneſs. Theſe *two* points I have ſpoken to. I ſhall now proceed to the

Third, namely, That the chriſtian religion doth ſupply all the defects and weakneſſes and imperfections of the Jewiſh diſpenſation.

The Jewiſh religion had very conſiderable advantages above the meer *light of nature*, which was all that the heathen world had to conduct them towards eternal happineſs; the *Jews* had the knowledge of the one true God, and very ſignal and particular teſtimonies of the divine providence, which did naturally tend to beget in them good hopes of a future life, and the rewards of another world; they had the natural law reveal'd, and the main precepts of it written with God's own hand, and by *Moſes* deliver'd to them; by which means they had a more certain and diſtinct knowledge of their duty; they had Prophets frequently ſent to them, to admoniſh them of their duty, and to exhort them to repentance, and to warn them of approaching judgments. They had good encouragement given to hope for the pardon of ſin, by God's appointment of ſeveral ways of expiation; which how unlikely ſoever they were to be available to the effectual expiation of ſin, yet they did ſignify that the divine nature was placable, and did ſeem to figure ſome more effectual way, deſign'd by God for that purpoſe, that ſhould be exhibited in due time. And finally they had moſt expreſs promiſes and threatenings of temporal bleſſings and judgments, to encourage them in their obedience, and to deter them from the tranſgreſſion of God's laws. Theſe advantages the *Jews* plainly had above the reſt of the world, *God did not deal ſo with other nations, neither had the heathen ſuch a knowledge of God's laws.*

But notwithſtanding this, the Jewiſh religion was very ſhort and defective, very weak and ineffectual to the great end of righteouſneſs and true holineſs, and to raiſe men to that perfection of goodneſs, of which human nature, through the grace of God, is capable; and therefore there wanted a more perfect inſtitution, to ſupply the defects and weakneſs and imperfection even of that divine revelation which God had made to the *Jews*, and really to effect and accompliſh that which the Jewiſh religion attempted and aimed at, and was but, as I may ſay, rudely begun under that imperfect inſtitution. And this the goſpel, or the chriſtian religion revealed by our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt hath fully effected, as will evidently appear by a particular ſurvey and conſideration of the main defects of the Jewiſh religion, which I ſhall ſhew to be all perfectly made up by the revelation of the Goſpel, and the doctrine of Chriſtianity, in theſe following particulars.

Firſt, It was a great defect of the Jewiſh religion, that a conſiderable part of it was meerly *external*, concerning the purification of *the body* and *the fleſh*, and only figurative of that *inward* purity and *real* righteouſneſs, which renders men truly good, and like to God; for which reaſon the Jewiſh inſtitution is by the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* call'd *the law of a carnal commandment*, *Heb.* vii. 16. and *Chap.* ix. 10. is ſaid *to conſiſt only* (that is chiefly) *in meats and drinks, and divers waſhings, and carnal ordinances impoſed on them until the time of reformation*; that is, till the Meſſias ſhould come and give ſuch laws as ſhould really tend to reform the hearts and lives of men; and therefore theſe laws and ordinances are call'd *poor pitiful elements*, and *the rudiments of the world*, fitted rather for *children* in underſtanding and goodneſs, than to bring *men* to any maturity and perfection in goodneſs. All their rites of purification did *only ſanctify to the purifying of the fleſh*; but *did not purge the conſcience from dead works*, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* ſpeaks, Chap. ix. 13, 14. *they could not make thoſe that performed and obſerved them perfect, as pertaining to the conſcience*, ver. 9. that is, theſe laws had no effect upon the minds of men, to make them really better, to cure them of their *moral* defects and impurities, their ſins and vices.

But the chriſtian inſtitution doth perfectly ſupply this defect, by taking us off from thoſe *carnal* and *external* obſervances, and principally requiring that we *worſhip God in ſpirit and in truth*; by giving us ſuch laws as wholly tend to advance *real* and *ſubſtantial* goodneſs, purity and holineſs of heart and life, ſuch as mainly tend to reform the minds and manners of men, and to make us like to that holy and perfect Being whom we worſhip: and beſides an external, humble and reverent demeanour of ourſelves in the worſhip of God, (to which natural religion doth likewiſe direct;) Chriſtianity hath only inſtituted *two* ſolemn *external rites, viz. Baptiſm*, and *the Lord's Supper*; whereby we ſolemnly oblige ourſelves to the practice of all virtue and goodneſs, I ſay *only theſe two*, that by the multitude of *external* obſervances, Chriſtians might not be taken off from the minding of the *real* and *ſubſtantial* duties of religion.

And therefore the church of *Rome* have extremely abated and weaken'd the force of Chriſtianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amuſing them with *external rites*, which they have multiplied to that exceſſive degree, as to make the *yoke* of Chriſt really *heavier* than that of *Moſes*, and the chriſtian religion a more *external* and *carnal commandment* than that of the law, and by this means have diverted and taken off the minds of men from the main deſign of Chriſtianity, inſomuch that they are ſo employ'd and taken up with matters of *external ceremony*, that they have no leiſure to think of being *good men*, and to mind the *great* and *ſubſtantial* duties and virtues of the chriſtian life; ſo that they have ſpoil'd the chriſtian religion of one of its chief excellencies and perfections, I mean *the ſimplicity of its worſhip*, which they have now incumber'd with ſo many fooliſh and frivolous *rites* and *obſervances*, as do not only render it more burdenſome, but leſs apt to make men *inwardly* and *ſubſtantially* good, than even *Judaiſm* itſelf. This is ſo true and ſo viſible, that the wiſer and better ſort of them have complain'd of it for ſeveral ages, and ſtill do, as much as they dare for fear of the *inquiſition*, or ſome other cenſure.

Secondly, Another defect of the law of *Moſes* was, that it did not give encouragement enough to repentance, by declaring and aſſuring to us any certain way and method for the expiation and forgiveneſs of ſin. This the rites of all religions aimed at, and pretended to; but were very ineffectual to that end. The heathen ſacrifices, and all the cruel and barbarous rites belonging to them, did all pretend to be ſo many ways of appeaſing the offended deity, and of making atonement and expiation for ſin; and the ſacrifices of the Jews were inſtituted by God himſelf, to make an *external* and *legal expiation*, and to be the types and ſhadows of *a better* and *more perfect ſacrifice*, which ſhould really expiate ſin: but even this was very darkly and imperfectly diſcovered to them; beſides, that the expiations of the law did only extend to the leaſt ſort of ſins, thoſe of *ignorance* and *inadvertency*, but not at all to *preſumptuous* ſins, and ſuch as were committed with *a high hand*, nor to *wilful* and *deliberate* ſins, except in ſome very few and rare caſes particularly mention'd in the law; ſo that though a great part of the religious rites both of the Pagan and Jewiſh religion, aimed at the expiation of ſin, yet were they really ineffectual to that end; and upon the whole matter, mankind, tho' they conceived good hope of God's mercy and forgiveneſs in caſe of repentance, *(Who* *can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his anger?)* yet they were unacquainted with any certain and effectual means to that purpoſe.

It remains then, that this great bleſſing of the forgiveneſs of ſins, was never ſufficiently declared and aſſured to mankind, but through Jeſus Chriſt in the Goſpel. So St. *Paul* expreſly aſſerts, *Acts* xiii. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins, and by him all that believe are juſtified from all things, from which ye could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes.* The Goſpel hath provided an expiation for all ſins in general, and that by a ſacrifice of ineſtimable value, *the blood of the Son of God.* And this is a mighty encouragement to repentance, and one moſt effectual means to reclaim men from their ſins, to be aſſured that they are indemnified for what is paſt. And this the Apoſtle means when he ſays, *Gal.* iii. 13. that *Chriſt hath redeemed us from the curſe of the law, being made a curſe for us*; that is, whereas the law left ſinners, as to thoſe ſins which ſtood moſt in need of pardon, under a curſe, having provided no expiation for them, Chriſt hath redeemed them from *that curſe*, by making a general expiation for ſin; and in this ſenſe it is that the author to the *Hebrews* ſays, *chap.* ix. 15. that Chriſt died *for the redemption of the tranſgreſſions that were under the firſt covenant*; that is, for thoſe ſins for which the covenant of the law had provided no way of forgiveneſs; and therefore St. *John* ſays emphatically 1 *John* i. 7. that *the blood of Jeſus Chriſt cleanſeth us from all ſin.*

Thirdly, The law did not afford ſufficiently plain and certain rules and directions for a good life. As the corruption and degeneracy of mankind grew worſe, ſo the light of nature waxed dimmer and dimmer, and the rule of good and evil was more doubtful and uncertain, and that in very conſiderable inſtances of our duty. The law of *Moſes* was peculiar to the *Jews:* and even to them, who only had the benefit and advantage of it, it did not give clear and perfect light and direction as to *moral* duties and thoſe things which are of an *eternal* and *immutable* reaſon and goodneſs. And therefore our Saviour in this ſermon explains it to a greater perfection than it was underſtood to have among the *Jews*, or the letter of it ſeemed to intend, and hath not only forbidden ſeveral things permitted by that law, as *divorce* and *retaliation of injuries*; but hath heightned our duty in ſeveral inſtances of it, requiring us *to love our enemies*, and *to forgive the greateſt injuries and provocations, though never ſo often repeated*, and not only *not to revenge them*, but *to requite them with good turns*; which were not underſtood by mankind to be laws before, but yet when duly conſider'd, are very agreeable to right reaſon, and the ſenſe of the wiſeſt and beſt men. So that the chriſtian religion hath not only fixt and determined our duty, and brought it to a *greater certainty*, but hath raiſed it to a *greater perfection*, and rendered it every way fit to bring the minds of men to a more divine temper, and a more reaſonable and perfect way of ſerving God, than ever the world was inſtructed in before.

Fourthly, The promiſes and threatnings of the law were only of *temporal* good and evil things, which are, in compariſon of the *endleſs* rewards and puniſhments of *another world*, but very languid and faint motives to obedience. Not but that the *Jews* under the law had ſuch apprehenſions of their own immortality, and of a future ſtate of happineſs and miſery after this life, as natural light ſuggeſted to them; which was in moſt but a wavering and uncertain perſuaſion, and conſequently of ſmall efficacy to engage men to their duty; but the law of *Moſes* added little or nothing to the clearneſs of thoſe natural notions concerning a future ſtate, and the ſtrengthning of this perſuaſion in the minds of men; it did rather ſuppoſe it, than give any new force and life to it. And for this reaſon more particularly the Apoſtle tells us, that *the law was* but *weak* to make men good; becauſe it did not work ſtrongly enough upon the hopes and fears of men by the weight of its promiſes, and the terror of its threatnings; and that for this *weakneſs* and *imperfection* of it, it was *removed*, and a more *powerful* and *awakening* diſpenſation brought in the place of it; *Heb.* vii. 18, 19. *For there is verily a diſannulling of the commandment that was before* (that is, of the Jewiſh law) *for the weakneſs and unprofitableneſs thereof*; *for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did*; that is the covenant of the Goſpel, which promiſeth *eternal* life. And *chap.* viii. 6. for this reaſon more eſpecially the Apoſtle ſays, that Chriſt had *obtained a more excellent miniſtry, being the Mediator of a better covenant, which was eſtabliſh'd upon better promiſes.* And Rom. i. 16, 18. St. *Paul* tells us, that for this reaſon *the Goſpel is the power of God unto ſalvation*, becauſe *therein the wrath of God is* *revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men.* The clear revelation of *a future judgment*, was that which made the Goſpel ſo proper and ſo powerful an inſtrument for the ſalvation of men. The great impiety of mankind, and their impenitency in it, was not ſo much to be wonder'd at before, while the world was in a great meaſure ignorant of the infinite danger of a wicked life; and therefore God is ſaid in ſome ſort *to overlook it*; *but now he commands all men every where to repent, becauſe he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead, Acts* xvii. 30, 31. The clear diſcovery and perfect aſſurance of a *future judgment*, calls loudly upon all men to leave their ſins, and turn to God.

Fifthly, The covenant of the law had no ſpiritual promiſes contained in it, of the grace and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit, for the mortifying of ſin, and enabling men to their duty, and ſupporting them under ſufferings: but the Goſpel is full of clear and expreſs promiſes to this purpoſe. Our Saviour hath aſſured us, *that God will give his holy Spirit to them that aſk him, Luke* xi. 13. and this the Apoſtle tells us is actually conſerr'd upon all true Chriſtians, thoſe who do ſincerely embrace and believe the Goſpel, *Rom.* viii. 9. *If any man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his.* Hence the Goſpel is call'd by the ſame Apoſtle, *the law of the Spirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus, ver.* 2. of that chap. *The law of the Spirit of life in Chriſt Jeſus, hath made me free from the law of ſin and death*; and in the next words he tells us, that herein manifeſtly appeared the weakneſs of the law, that it left men deſtitute of this mighty help and advantage (at leaſt to any ſpecial promiſe of it) *What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the fleſh, God ſending his own Son in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh, and by making him a ſacrifice for ſin condemned ſin in the fleſh, that the righteouſeneſs of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit*; that is, that that righteouſneſs which the law aimed at, and ſignified, but was too weak to effect, might be really accompliſh'd in us, *who walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit*; that is, who are acted and aſſiſted by a higher and better principle than men either have in *nature*, or *the carnal diſpenſation of the law* did endow men withal. And becauſe of this great defect, the law is ſaid to be a ſtate of *bondage* and *ſervitude*; and on the contrary, the Goſpel, by reaſon of this mighty advantage, is call'd a ſtate of *adoption* and *liberty*, ver. 15. *for ye have not received the Spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father*; and 2 *Cor.* iii. 17. *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.* And to this very thing St. *Paul* appeals, as that whereby men might judge whether the law or the Goſpel were the more excellent and powerful diſpenſation, *Gal.* iii. 2. *This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* As if he had ſaid, let this one thing determine that whole matter; were ye made partakers of this great privilege and bleſſing of the Spirit, while ye were of the Jewiſh religion, or ſince ye became Chriſtians? And, *ver.* 14. he calls it *the bleſſing of Abraham*; that is, the bleſſing promiſed to all nations by *Abraham's ſeed*, namely, *the Meſſias*; *that the bleſſing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jeſus Chriſt, that we might receive the promiſe of the Spirit through faith.*

And then, for the ſupporting us under afflictions, the Goſpel promiſeth an extraordinary aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit to us, 1 *Pet.* iv. 14. *If ye be reproached for the name of Chriſt, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God reſteth upon you.*

But were there no good men under the diſpenſation of the law? Yes certainly there were, and they were ſo by the grace and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit: but then this was an effect of the divine goodneſs; but not of any *ſpecial promiſe*, contained in that covenant, of divine grace and aſſiſtance to be conferred on all thoſe that were admitted into it. But thus it is in the new covenant of the Goſpel; and therefore the law is call'd *a dead letter*, *the oldneſs of the letter*, and *the miniſtration of the letter*; in oppoſition to the Goſpel, which is call'd the *miniſtration of the Spirit*. And this the Apoſtle lays ſpecial weight upon, as a main difference between theſe *two covenants*, that the *firſt* gave an *external law*, but *the new covenant* offers *inward grace* and *aſſiſtance* to enable men to obedience, and hath an *inward* and *powerful efficacy* upon the minds of men, accompanying the miniſtration of it, *Heb.* viii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *For if that firſt covenant had been faultleſs, then ſhould no place have been ſought for the ſecond. For finding fault with them he ſaith, Behold the days come, ſaith the Lord, when I will make*

make a new covenant with the houſe of Iſrael, and with the houſe of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, &c. *For this is the covenant which I will make with the houſe of Iſrael after thoſe days, ſaith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.*

And of this *inward grace* and *aſſiſtance* we are further ſecured, by the powerful and prevalent and perpetual interceſſion of our High-Prieſt for ſinners at the right hand of God; not like the interceſſion of the prieſts under the law, who being ſinners themſelves, were leſs fit to intercede for others; but *we have an High-Prieſt that is holy, harmleſs, undefiled* and *ſeparate from ſinners, who by the eternal Spirit offered himſelf without ſpot to God,* to purchaſe for us thoſe bleſſings which he intercedes for. The prieſts under the law were interceſſors upon *earth*; but *Chriſt is enter'd into heaven itſelf, now to appear in the preſence of God for us,* Heb. ix. 24. The prieſts under the law were removed from this office by death; but *Chriſt, becauſe he continues for ever, hath an unchangeable prieſthood,* and is an everlaſting advocate and interceſſor for us, in the virtue of his moſt meritorious ſacrifice continually preſented to his Father, where he is *always at the right hand of God,* to preſent our prayers to him, and to obtain pardon of our ſins, and *grace to help in time of need,* and by his interceſſion in heaven, to procure all thoſe bleſſings to be actually conferr'd upon us, which he purchaſed for us by his blood upon earth; *wherefore he is able to ſave to the utmoſt all thoſe that come to God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them,* as the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Heb.* vii. 25.

And thus I have, as briefly as well I could, ſhewed how the chriſtian religion doth ſupply all the weakneſſes and imperfections of the Jewiſh religion, and conſequently, does in no wiſe *contradict* or *interfere* with the great deſign of *the Law, and the Prophets,* but hath *perfected* and *made up* whatever was weak or wanting in that inſtitution, to make men truly good, or, as the expreſſion is in the Prophet *Daniel, to bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs*; that is, to *clear* and *confirm* thoſe laws of holineſs and righteouſneſs, which are of *indeſpenſible* and *eternal* obligation.

And if this be the great deſign of our Saviour's coming, and the chriſtian doctrine be every way fitted to advance righteouſneſs and true holineſs, and to make us as excellently good as this imperfect ſtate of mortality will admit, ſince it hath many advantages incomparably beyond any religion or inſtitution that ever was in the world, both in reſpect of the perfection of its laws, and the force of its motives and arguments to repentance and a holy life, and in reſpect of the encouragements which it gives, and the examples which it ſets before us, and the powerful aſſiſtance which it offers to us, to enable us *to cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God*; what a ſhame is this to us, who are under the power of this excellent inſtitution, if the temper of our minds, and the tenor of our converſation be not in ſome meaſure anſwerable to the goſpel of Chriſt! The greater helps and advantages we have of being good, the greater things may juſtly be expected from us; for *to whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required.*

Chriſtianity is *the fulfilling of the righteouſneſs of the law,* by *walking not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit,* by *mortifying the deeds of the fleſh,* and by *bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit,* which are *love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, fidelity, meekneſs, and temperance. The righteouſneſs of faith* doth not conſiſt in a barren and ineffectual belief of the Goſpel, in a mere embracing of the promiſes of it, and relying upon Chriſt for ſalvation; in *a faith without works,* which is *dead*; but in *a faith which worketh by love,* in becoming *new creatures,* and in *keeping the commandments of God, the righteouſneſs of faith ſpeaking on this wiſe. This is his commandment, that we ſhould believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, and love one another, as he gave us commandment,* 1 John iii. 23. and, *this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo,* 1 John iv. 21. *That we approve the things that are excellent, being filled with the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, to the glory and praiſe of God,* Phil. i. 10, 11. *Whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, mind theſe things,* Chap. iv. 8.

And then conſidering what abundant proviſion the Goſpel hath made for our attainment of everlaſting ſalvation, we are altogether without excuſe, if we periſh. Since God *hath raiſed up ſo mighty a ſalvation for us; how ſhall we eſcape?* If we *die in our* *ſins*, it is not becauſe God would not forgive them, but becauſe we would not repent and be ſaved; the fault is all our own, and we owe it wholly to ourſelves, if we be loſt and undone for ever. If when *life and death*, heaven and hell, are ſo plainly *ſet before us*, eternal miſery and perdition fall to our lot and portion, it is not becauſe we were not warned of our danger, or becauſe happineſs and *the things of our peace were hid from our eyes*, but becauſe we have made death and deſtruction our obſtinate and final choice.

But, beloved, I hope better things of you, and things which accompany ſalvation, tho' I thus ſpeak. Only let your converſation be as becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt; and if we be careful to perform the conditions which the Goſpel requires on our part, we ſhall not fail to be made *partakers of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed to us, for his mercy's ſake in Jeſus Chriſt.*

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

SERMON LII.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Neceſſity, in order to Juſtification and Salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion; but a new Creature.

THERE are two epiſtles of St. *Paul*, namely, that to the *Romans*, and this to the *Galatians*, which are principally and particularly deſign'd to confute a falſe perſuaſion, which had prevailed amongſt many Chriſtians, eſpecially thoſe who were converted from Judaiſm; *that it was not enough for men to embrace and confeſs the chriſtian religion, unleſs they kept the law of Moſes, or at leaſt ſubmitted to that great precept of circumciſion; the neglect whereof among all the affirmative precepts of the law, was only threaten'd with exciſion, or being cut off from among the people.* And of the prevalency of this error, and the great diſturbance which it made in the chriſtian church, we have a particular account, *Acts* xv. where a general council of the Apoſtles is call'd, and a letter written in their names to all the chriſtian churches, to rectify their apprehenſions in this matter, *ver.* 24. of that *chap. For as much as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words ſubverting your ſouls, ſaying ye muſt be circumciſed, and keep the law, to whom we gave no ſuch commandment*, &c.

And upon this occaſion likewiſe it was, that St. *Paul* wrote this epiſtle to the *Galatians*, as likewiſe that to the *Romans*; in the former of which, after he had at large confuted this error, (which he calls *the preaching of another Goſpel, than what the Apoſtles had preached, and the Chriſtians firſt received*) in the beginning of the v*th* Chapter he exhorts them to aſſert the liberty, which Chriſt had purchas'd for them, from the obligation of the law of *Moſes*, ver. 1, 2. *Stand faſt therefore in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made us free, and be not intangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul ſay unto you, that if ye be circumciſed, Chriſt ſhall profit you nothing*; not that hereby he condemneth circumciſion, as a thing evil in itſelf; for God never inſtituted or commanded any thing that was ſo; but he oppoſeth the opinion of the neceſſity of it to our juſtification and ſalvation, when the Goſpel had ſo plainly taken away the obligation and uſe of it; and conſequently to affirm ſtill the neceſſity of it, was really to renounce Chriſtianity. For if Judaiſm was ſtill the way to ſalvation, Chriſtianity was to no purpoſe; and if Chriſtianity be now the way, then the obligation to the Jewiſh religion was ceaſed. To avoid the force of this reaſoning, it was not enough for the falſe Apoſtles to ſay (as it ſeems they did) that Chriſtians were not obliged univerſally to the whole law of *Moſes*, but principally to the law of circumciſion; becauſe circumciſion being the ſign and badge of that covenant, whoever took that upon him, did thereby own his obligation to the whole law, *ver.* 3, 4. *For I teſtify again to every man that is circumciſed, that he is a debtor to do the whole law; Chriſt is become of no effect to you, whoſoever of you are juſtified by the law, ye are fallen from grace*; that is, whoever of you expect and profeſs to be juſtified by the law of *Moſes*, ye take away the neceſſity and uſe of the chriſtian religion; and *are fallen from grace*; that is, do in effect renounce the Goſpel; for *we, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteouſnſes by faith*, ver. 5. *we by the Spirit*, in oppoſition to *circumciſion*, which was *in the fleſh*, do expect to be juſtified by the belief of the Goſpel. *For in Jeſus Chriſt neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion*, ver 6. that is, now under the diſpenſation of the Goſpel by Chriſt Jeſus, it ſignifies nothing to a man's juſtification or ſalvation, whether he be circumciſed, or not circumciſed, whether he be a Jew or a Gentile. All that the Goſpel requires as neceſſary to theſe purpoſes, is, that we perform the conditions of the Goſpel, that ſo we may be capable of being made partakers of the bleſſings of it.

Now as the great bleſſing and benefit of the Goſpel is variouſly expreſt, as by *the forgiveneſs of our ſins*, by *our acceptance with God*, or (which comprehends both) by *our juſtification*, ſometimes by *adoption*, and *our being made the ſons and children of God*, ſometimes by *redemption*, and (which is the conſummation of all) by *ſalvation* and *eternal life*; I ſay, as the bleſſing and benefit of the Goſpel is in Scripture expreſt to us by theſe ſeveral terms, which do in effect all ſignify the ſame thing; ſo our duty, and the condition the Goſpel requires on our part, is likewiſe as variouſly expreſt; ſometimes, and that very frequently, by the word *faith*, as being the great ſource and principle of all religious acts and performances; but then this *faith* muſt not be a bare aſſent and perſuaſion of the truth of the Goſpel, but ſuch an effectual belief, as expreſſeth itſelf in ſuitable acts of obedience and holineſs, ſuch as the Apoſtle here calls πίστις δι᾽ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη, *a faith which worketh by love*, a faith that is *inſpir'd* and *acted*, or rather *conſummate and made perfect by charity*, (for ſo the word doth often ſignify,) and then this phraſe will be juſt of the ſame importance with that of St. *James*, chap. ii. 22. *by works is faith made perfect*. Sometimes, and that alſo very frequently, the condition of the Goſpel is expreſt by words which ſignify the change of our ſtate, as by *repentance*, *converſion*, *regeneration*, *renovation*, *ſanctification*, *the new creature*, and *the new man*, which expreſſions are all ſo well known, that I need not refer to particular texts; ſometimes the condition of the Goſpel is expreſt by the viſible and ſenſible effects of this inward change in our outward life and actions; as namely by *obedience* and *keeping the commandments of God*. So *Heb.* v. 9. Chriſt is ſaid to be *the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*; where *obedience* is plainly put for the whole condition of the Goſpel, the performance whereof entitles us to eternal life and happineſs.

Now that by theſe various expreſſions, one and the ſame thing is certainly intended and meant, *viz.* the condition of the Goſpel; that which is requir'd on our part, in order to our full and perfect juſtification and acceptance with God, is evident beyond all denial; by comparing the three different ways whereby St. *Paul* doth expreſs the ſame propoſition for ſenſe and ſubſtance; in which he tells us, what it is that will avail to our juſtification under the Goſpel, that is, according to the terms of the chriſtian religion; that is neither here nor there, that it ſignifies nothing whether a man be circumciſed or not, but that we be ſo qualified as the Goſpel requires, that the conditions upon which the bleſſings of the Goſpel are promiſed be found in us. And there are three texts wherein the ſame thing is plainly intended in three very different expreſſions. *Gal.* v. 6. *In Jeſus Chriſt neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion: but faith, which is conſummate*, or *made perfect by charity*. Gal. vi. 15. *For in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion: but a new creature*. 1 Cor. vii. 19. *Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing: but the keeping of the commandments of God*. It is evident, that in theſe three texts the Apoſtle deſigns to ſay the ſame thing, and conſequently that *faith which is made perfect by charity*, and *the new creature*, and *keeping of the commandments of God*, are the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance, *viz.* the condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God under the covenant of the Goſpel, or in the chriſtian religion.

I ſhall at preſent, by God's aſſiſtance, handle the ſecond of theſe texts. *In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion: but a new creature.* And here the condition of the Goſpel is expreſt to us, by the change of our ſtate, which in Scripture is call'd our *regeneration,* or becoming *new creatures,* and *new men.* Circumciſion was but an outward ſign and mark upon the body, and the fleſh, though it did indeed prefigure and typify the inward circumciſion of the heart, the giving of men *new hearts,* and *new ſpirits,* under the more perfect diſpenſation of the Goſpel: but now *in Jeſus Chriſt,* that is in the chriſtian religion, the preſence or the want of this outward mark will avail nothing to our juſtification; but that which was ſignified by it, the renovation of our hearts and ſpirits, our becoming *new creatures,* is now the condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God.

The falſe Apoſtles indeed did lay great ſtreſs upon the buſineſs of circumciſion, not ſo much out of zeal to the law of *Moſes,* as to avoid perſecution, *ver.* 12. *They conſtrain you to be circumciſed, only leſt they ſhould ſuffer perſecution for the croſs of Chriſt.* For at that time, though the Chriſtians were perſecuted, yet the *Jews* by the *Roman* edicts had the free exerciſe of their religion, and therefore they gloried in this external mark of circumciſion, becauſe it exempted them from ſuffering; but St. *Paul* gloried in his ſufferings for Chriſt, and the marks of that upon his body. *ver.* 14. *God forbid that I ſhould glory ſave in the croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; and *ver.* 17. *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jeſus.* He tells them, what neceſſities ſoever they might pretend of circumciſion, either for their juſtification, or ſalvation, the true ground of all was to ſave themſelves from temporal ſufferings; and that in the chriſtian religion it ſignifieth nothing to recommend them to the favour of God whether they were circumciſed or not; nothing would be available to this purpoſe, but the renovation and change of their hearts and lives. *For in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but a new creature,* καινὴ κτίσις *a new creation,* to intimate the greatneſs of the change, which chriſtianity, throughly entertained, made in men.

Having thus cleared the occaſion and meaning of theſe words, I come now to conſider the particulars contained in them, namely, theſe *two* things.

Firſt, That the Goſpel had taken away the obligation of the law of *Moſes. In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion.*

Secondly, That according to the terms of the chriſtian religion, nothing will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; *neither circumciſion, nor uncircumciſion: but a new creature.*

1. That the Goſpel hath taken away the obligation of the law of *Moſes. In Chriſt Jeſus,* that is, now under the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, *neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion.* There was never any general obligation upon mankind to this rite of circumciſion, but only upon the ſeed of *Abraham*; but yet upon the preaching of the goſpel, many of the Jewiſh Chriſtians would have brought the Gentiles under this yoke; pretending that Chriſtianity was but a ſuperſtructure upon the law of *Moſes,* which together with the Goſpel, was to be the religion of the whole world; and there was ſome colour for this, becauſe our Saviour himſelf ſubmitted to this rite, and was circumciſed; which the Apoſtle takes notice of in the *ivth* Chap. of this Epiſt. *ver.* 4. *When the fulneſs of time was come, God ſent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law,* that is, *circumciſed.* And 'tis true indeed, that our bleſſed Saviour was circumciſed, but not to ſignify to us the perpetuity of circumciſion, and the continuance of it under the chriſtian religion, but for a quite different end; as a teſtimony of his obedience to that law, which though afterwards it was to expire, yet was to be obeyed whilſt it was in force, by all that were born under it; he was *made under the law,* and *it became him,* who came to teach mankind obedience to the laws of God, *to fulfil all righteouſneſs* himſelf: And therefore the Apoſtle in this epiſtle, where he takes notice of this, that Chriſt was *made under the law,* gives this reaſon of it, that he might be the fitter to free thoſe who were under it, from the ſervitude of it; he was *made under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law*; and that thoſe who were in the condition of ſervants before, might be ſet at liberty, and *receive the adoption of ſons.*

But how did his being *made under the law,* qualify him *to redeem thoſe who were under the law?* Thus; by ſubmitting to it himſelf, he ſhewed that he owned the authority of it, and that he had no malice or enmity againſt it; or as he himſelf expreſſes it, that *he came not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfil it.* And being *fulfill'd,* and having ſerv'd the time and end for which God intended it, it expir'd of itſelf; like a law which is not made for perpetuity, but limited to a certain period. And our bleſſed Saviour, who came with greater authority than *Moſes*, and gave greater teſtimony of his divine authority, had ſufficient power to declare the expiration of it; and by commiſſioning his diſciples before and after his death to preach the Goſpel to the whole world, he put an end to that *particular law and diſpenſation*, which only concern'd the *Jewiſh nation*, by giving *a general law to all mankind*.

So that from the death of our Saviour, and his aſcenſion into heaven, upon which followed the general publication of the Goſpel, the law of *Moſes* ceaſed, and according to our Saviour's expreſs appointment, Proſelytes were to be admitted into the chriſtian church only by *baptiſm*, and not by *circumciſion*. And if circumciſion, which was the ſign of that covenant, was laid aſide, then the whole obligation of that law and covenant which God had made with the Jews, was alſo ceaſed. It was once indeed the mark of God's choſen and peculiar people; but now that God hath revealed himſelf to the whole world by his Son, and offers ſalvation to all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, the *wall of ſeparation is broken down*, and circumciſion, which was the mark of diſtinction between Jews and Gentiles, is taken away; and therefore he is ſaid *to have made peace by his croſs, and to have blotted out and taken away the hand-writing of ordinances, nailing it to his croſs*; that is, from the time of his death to have taken away the obligation of the law of *Moſes*, tho' it was a good while after, before the Jews were wholly weaned from the veneration and uſe of it.

Nay, it was ſometime before the Apoſtles were clearly convinc'd, that the Goſpel was to be preach'd to the Gentiles; this being one of thoſe truths, which our Saviour promiſed after his departure, his Spirit ſhould lead them into the perfect knowledge of; and then they were fully inſtructed, that the law of *Moſes* was expir'd, and that it was no longer neceſſary to the ſalvation of men, that they ſhould be circumciſed, and keep that law. And tho' it was once enjoin'd by God himſelf to the Jews, and their obedience to it was neceſſary to their acceptance with God; yet now by Chriſt Jeſus, God hath offered ſalvation to men upon other terms; and whether they were circumciſed, or not, was of no moment to their juſtification or ſalvation one way or other; but provided they perform'd the condition of this new covenant of the Goſpel, they were all alike capable of the divine favour and acceptance.

But I proceed to that, which I mainly intend to proſecute from theſe words; and that is the

Second particular in the text, namely that according to the terms of the goſpel, and the chriſtian religion, nothing will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; *neither circumciſion, nor uncircumciſion: but a new creature*. For the full explication of this, I ſhall do theſe *three* things.

Firſt, Shew, what is imply'd in this phraſe of a *new creature*.

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that it is the ſame in ſubſtance with *faith perfected by charity*, and with *keeping the commandments of God*.

Thirdly, That it is very reaſonable it ſhould be ſo.

1. What is imply'd in this phraſe of a *new creature*. It is plain at firſt ſight, that it is a metaphorical expreſſion of that great and thorough change which is made in men by the goſpel, or the chriſtian religion. The Scripture ſets forth to us this change by great variety of expreſſions, by *converſion*, and *turning from our iniquities unto God*; by *repentance*, (which ſignifies a *change of our mind* and *reſolution*, and is in ſcripture call'd *repentance from dead works*, and *repentance unto life*;) by *regeneration*, or *being born again*; by *reſurrection from the dead*, and *riſing to newneſs of life*; by *ſanctification*, and being *waſh'd* and *cleans'd* from all filthineſs and impurity, which three laſt metaphors are imply'd *in baptiſm*, which is call'd *regeneration*, Tit. iii. 5. *According to his mercy he ſaved us by the waſhing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy Ghoſt*; and our being *born again of water and the holy Ghoſt*, John iii. 3. *Except a man be born again*, &c. and ver. 5. *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*; and *the purifying of our conſciences*, Heb. x. 22. *Having our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, and our bodies waſhed with pure water*; and *the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God*, 1 Pet. iii. 21. *Baptiſm doth now ſave us; not the putting away of the filth of the fleſh, but the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God*; and finally our being *baptiz'd into the death and reſurrection of Chriſt*, Rom. vi. 3, 4.

Know ye not that ſo maay of us as were baptized into Jeſus Chriſt were baptized into his death? therefore we are buried with him by baptiſm into death, that like as Chriſt was raiſed up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even ſo we alſo ſhould walk in newneſs of life.) And laſtly this change is ſet forth to us by *renovation*, and our being made *new creatures* and *new men*, 2 Cor. v. 17. *Therefore if any man be in Chriſt*, that is, profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian, *he is a new creature*; *old things are paſt away, behold all things are become new.* And ſo likewiſe, *Epheſ.* iv. 22, 23, 24. this great change is expreſt by *putting off concerning the former converſation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the luſts of deceit, and being renewed in the ſpirit of our minds, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs.* The expreſſion is very emphatical, *renewed in the ſpirit of our minds*, that is, *in our very minds and ſpirits*, to ſignify to us that it is a moſt inward and thorough change, reaching to the very centre of our ſouls and ſpirits. And *Coloſſ.* iii. 9, 10, 11. it is repreſented much after the ſame manner, *Seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumciſion nor uncircumciſion, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Chriſt is all, and in all.* Which is the ſame with what the Apoſtle ſays here in the text, that *in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion: but a new creature*; that is, theſe external marks and differences ſignify nothing: but this inward change, *the new creature*; *Chriſt formed in us*, this in the chriſtian religion is *all in all*.

But that we may the more clearly underſtand the juſt importance of this metaphor *of a new creature*, or *a new creation*, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider what it doth certainly ſignify, by comparing this metaphorical phraſe with other plain texts of ſcripture.

And *Secondly*, That it doth not import what ſome would extend it to, ſo as to found doctrines of great conſequence upon the ſingle ſtrength of this, and the like metaphors in ſcripture, without any manner of countenance from plain texts.

Firſt, I ſhall conſider what this metaphor doth certainly import, ſo as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of ſcripture, namely theſe *two* things.

1. The greatneſs of this change.

2. That it is effected and wrought by a divine power.

1. The greatneſs of this change; it is called καινή κτίσις, *a new creation*; as if the chriſtian doctrine, firmly entertained and believed, did as it were mould and faſhion men over again, transforming them into a quite other ſort of perſons, than what they were before, and made ſuch a change in them, as the creating power of God did, in bringing this beautiful and orderly frame of things out of their dark and rude *Chaos*. Thus the Apoſtle repreſents it, 2 *Cor.* iv. 6. *God who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs*, (alluding to the firſt creation) *hath ſhined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jeſus Chriſt.* We are tranſlated from one extreme to another. *Acts* xxvi. 18. when our Lord ſends *Paul* to preach the goſpel to the Gentiles, he tells him what a change it would make in them, by *opening their eyes, and turning them from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* And St. *Peter* expreſſes the change which Chriſtianity makes in men, by their being *call'd out of darkneſs into a marvellous light*, 1 *Pet.* ii. 9. And ſo St. *Paul*, *Eph.* v. 8. *Ye were ſometimes darkneſs, but now are ye light in the Lord.*

And indeed wherever the doctrine of Chriſt hath its full effect, and perfect work, it makes a mighty change both in their inward principles, and outward practice; it darts a new light into their minds, ſo that they ſee things otherwiſe than they did before, and forms a different judgment of things from what they did before; it endues them with a new principle, and new reſolutions, gives them another ſpirit, and another temper, a quite different ſenſe and guſt of things from what they formerly had. And this inward change of their minds neceſſarily produceth a proportionable change in their lives and converſations, ſo that the man ſteers quite another courſe, acts after another rate, and drives on quite other deſigns from what he did before.

And this is remarkably ſeen in thoſe who are reclaimed from impiety and prophaneneſs to religion, and from a vicious to a virtuous courſe of life. The change is great and real in all; but not ſo ſenſible and viſible in ſome, as others; in thoſe who are made good by the inſenſible ſteps of a pious and virtuous education; as in thoſe who are tranſlated out of a quite contrary ſtate, and *turn'd from the power of Satan unto God,* and *tranſlated out of the kingdom of darkneſs, into the kingdom of Chriſt*; which was the caſe of the heathen world, in their firſt converſion to Chriſtianity.

Secondly, This change is effected and wrought by a divine power, of the ſame kind with that, which created the world, and raiſed up Chriſt Jeſus from the dead; two great and glorious inſtances of the divine power; and to theſe the ſcripture frequently alludes, when it ſpeaks of this *new creation*. *God who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, hath ſhined into our hearts.* *Like as Chriſt was raiſed from the dead by the glory of the Father, ſo we alſo are raiſed to newneſs of life*, ſaith St. *Paul Rom.* vi. 4. And to the ſame purpoſe the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Epheſ.* i. 19, 20. *And that ye may know what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the operation of his mighty power, which he wrought in Chriſt, when he raiſed him from the dead.* So that our *renovation*, and being made *new creatures*, is an inſtance of the ſame glorious power, which exerted itſelf in the firſt creation of things, and in the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt from the dead; but not altogether after the ſame manner, as I ſhall ſhew under the next head.

I ſhould now in the *ſecond* place proceed to ſhew, that this metaphor of a new creation doth not import what ſome men would extend it to, ſo as to found doctrines of great conſequence upon the ſingle ſtrength of this and other like metaphors of ſcripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts. But this I reſerve to another diſcourſe.

SERMON LIII.

The ſecond Sermon on this Text.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Neceſſity, in order to Juſtification and Salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion; but a new Creature.

IN theſe words are contained theſe *two* things.

Firſt, That the goſpel hath taken away the obligation of the law, having taken away the ſign of that covenant, which was *circumciſion*.

Secondly, That according to the terms of the goſpel, and the chriſtian religion, nothing will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives. For the full explication of this, I propounded to do theſe *three* things.

I. To ſhew what is imply'd in this phraſe of *a new creature*.

II. That this is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that it is the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance with thoſe other expreſſions, in the *two* parallel texts, of *faith perfected by charity* and *keeping the commandments of God*.

III. That it is very reaſonable that this ſhould be the condition of our juſtification, and acceptance to the favour of God.

I began with the *firſt* of theſe, *viz.* To ſhew what is imply'd in this phraſe of *a new creature*; as to which I ſhew'd,

Firſt, What this metaphor doth certainly import, ſo as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of ſcripture; namely, the greatneſs of this change, and that it is effected by a divine power. I now proceed,

Secondly, To ſhew that it doth not import what ſome would extend it to, and that ſo as to found doctrines of great conſequence upon the meer and ſingle ſtrength of this and other like metaphors of ſcripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts: ſuch doctrines as theſe *three.*

1. That as the creation was by an *irreſiſtible* act of the divine power, ſo is this *new creation*, or converſion of a ſinner..

2. That as creatures were *meerly paſſive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we to our converſion and regeneration.

3. That as the creation of the ſeveral ranks and kinds of creatures was *in an inſtant*, and effected by the powerful word of God, only ſaying, *let ſuch and ſuch things be*, and immediately they were; ſo this *new creation*, or the work of regeneration, is *in an inſtant*, and admits of no degrees.

Concerning theſe *three* doctrines, of great moment and conſequence in divinity, I ſhall ſhew with all the clearneſs and brevity I can, that they are built ſolely upon metaphors of ſcripture, tortur'd and ſtrain'd too far, without any real ground or foundation from ſcripture or reaſon; nay, contrary to the tenor of the one and the dictates of the other; nay indeed contrary to the general experience of the operation of God's grace upon the minds of men in their converſion.

Firſt, It is pretended, that as the creation was by an *irreſiſtible* act of the divine power, ſo is *the new creation*, or the converſion of a ſinner; and this is ſolely argued from the metaphorical expreſſions of ſcripture concerning converſion; ſuch as being *called out of darkneſs into light*, alluding to that powerful *word* of God, which in the firſt creation *commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs*; *being quicken'd, and rais'd to a new life*; and from this metaphor here in the text, of *a new creation*.

But ſurely it is a dangerous thing in divinity, to build doctrines upon metaphors, eſpecially if we ſtrain them to all the ſimilitudes which a quick and lively imagination can find out; whereas ſome one obvious thing is commonly intended in the metaphor, and the meaning is abſolved and acquitted in that, and it is folly to purſue it into all thoſe ſimilitudes which a good fancy may ſuggeſt. When our Saviour ſays, *that he will come as a thief in the night*, it is plain what he means; that the day of judgment will ſurpriſe the careleſs world, when they leaſt look for it, that *he will come at an hour when they are not aware*; and tho' he reſemble his coming to that of *a thief in the night*, yet here is nothing of *robbery* in the caſe. So here, when the change which Chriſtianity makes in men is called a *new creation*, this only imports the greatneſs of the change, which by the power of God's grace is made upon the hearts and lives of men; and the metaphor is ſufficiently abſolved in this plain ſenſe and meaning of it, agreeable to the literal expreſſions of ſcripture concerning this thing; and there is no need that this change ſhould in all other reſpects anſwer the work of creation; and conſequently there is no neceſſity that it ſhould be effected in an *irreſiſtible* manner, or that we ſhould be *altogether paſſive* in this change, and that we ſhould no ways concur to it by any act of our own, or that this work ſhould be done *in an inſtant*, and admit of no ſteps and degrees.

It is not neceſſary that this change ſhould be effected in an *irreſiſtible* manner. God may do ſo, when he pleaſeth, without any injury to his creatures; for it is certainly no wrong to any man to be made good and happy againſt his will; and I do not deny, but that God ſometimes does ſo. The call of the diſciples to follow Chriſt ſeems to have been a very ſudden and forcible impreſſion upon their minds, without any appearing reaſon for it; for it is not reaſonable for any man to leave his calling, and follow every one that bids him do ſo. The converſion of *Saul* from a perſecutor of Chriſtianity, to a zealous preacher of it, was certainly effected, if not in an *irreſiſtible*, yet in a very *forcible* and violent manner. The converſion of three thouſand at one ſermon, when the Holy Ghoſt deſcended in a viſible manner upon the Apoſtles, was certainly the effect of a mighty and *over-powering* degree of God's grace. And the like may be ſaid of the ſudden converſion of ſo many perſons from heatheniſm, and great wickedneſs and impiety of life, to the ſincere profeſſion of Chriſtianty, by the preaching of the Apoſtles afterwards.

But that this is not of abſolute neceſſity, nor the ordinary method of God's grace, to work upon the minds of men in ſo *over-powering*, much leſs in an *irreſiſtible* manner, is as plain as any thing of that nature can be, both from experience, and the reaſon of the thing, and the conſtant tenor of the ſcripture. We find that many (perhaps the greateſt part) of thoſe that are good are made ſo by the inſenſible ſteps and degrees of a religious education, and having been never vicious, can give no great account of any ſenſible change, only that when they came to years of underſtanding, they conſider'd things more, and the principles that were inſtill'd into them in their younger years did put forth themſelves more vigorouſly at that time, as ſeeds ſprout out of the ground, after they have a good while been buried and laid hid in the earth.

And it is contrary to reaſon, to make an *irreſiſtible* act of divine power neceſſary to our repentance, and converſion; becauſe this neceſſarily involves in it *two* things which ſeem very unreaſonable.

Firſt, That no man repents upon conſideration and choice, but upon mere force and violent neceſſity, which quite takes away the virtue of repentance, whatever virtue there may be in the conſequent acts of a regenerate ſtate.

Secondly, It implies that the converſion and repentance of thoſe upon whom God doth not work *irreſiſtibly* is impoſſible, which is the utmoſt can be ſaid to excuſe the impenitency of men, by taking it off from their own choice, and laying it upon the impoſſibility of the thing, and an utter diſability in them to chooſe and do otherwiſe.

And it is likewiſe contrary to the conſtant tenor of the Bible, which ſuppoſeth that men do very frequently reſiſt the grace and holy Spirit of God. It is ſaid of the Phariſees by our Saviour, *Luke* vii. 30. that *they rejected the counſel of God againſt themſelves*; that is, the merciful deſign of God for their ſalvation. And of the Jews, *Acts* vii. 51. that *they always reſiſted the holy Ghoſt*. So that ſome operations of God's grace and holy Spirit are *reſiſtible*, and ſuch, as if men did not reſiſt them, would be effectual to bring them to faith and repentance, elſe why are the Phariſees ſaid to *reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves*, that is, *to their own ruin*; implying, that if they had not rejected it, they might have been ſaved; and if they had, it had been without *irreſiſtible* grace; for that which was offered to them, was actually *reſiſted* by them. Other texts plainly ſhew, that the reaſon of mens impenitency and unbelief is not any thing wanting on God's part, but on theirs; as thoſe known texts, wherein our Saviour laments the caſe of *Jeruſalem*, becauſe they obſtinately brought deſtruction upon themſelves, *Luke* xix. 42. *If thou hadſt known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace:* intimating that they might have known them, ſo as to have prevented that deſolation which was coming upon them, and was a forerunner of their eternal ruin; *but now they are hid from thine eyes*; intimating that then God gave them up to their own blindneſs and obſtinacy; but the time was, when they might have *known the things of their peace*; which cannot be upon the ſuppoſition of the neceſſity of an *irreſiſtible* act of God's grace to their converſion, and repentance; becauſe then without that they could not have repented, and if that had been afforded to them, they had infallibly repented. So likewiſe in that other text *Matth.* xxiii. 37. *Oh! Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, how often would I have gathered thee, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not.* And in *John* v. 40. *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.* He *would have gathered them*, and they *would not*; he would have given them *life*, but they *would not come to him.* Are theſe ſerious and compaſſionate expoſtulations and declarations of our Saviour's gracious intention towards them, any ways conſiſtent with an impoſſibility of their repentance? which yet muſt be ſaid, if *irreſiſtible* grace be neceſſary thereto; for then repentance is impoſſible without it, and that it was not afforded to them is plain, becauſe they did not repent. The ſame may be ſaid of that ſolemn declaration of God, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 11. *As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* Can it be ſaid that God hath *no pleaſure in the death of ſinners*, and yet be true, that he denies to the greateſt part of them, that grace which is neceſſary to their repentance? Upon this ſuppoſition, how can it be true, that *if the mighty works that were done in Chorazin and Bethſaida, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented*, Mat. xi. 21. ſince *irreſiſtible* grace did not accompany thoſe miracles? for if it had, *Chorazin* and *Bethſaida had repented*, and without it *Tyre and Sidon could not repent*.

The ſame difficulty is in thoſe texts, wherein God is repreſented as expecting the repentance and converſion of ſinners; and our Saviour *wondering at their unbelief and hardneſs of heart, and upbraiding them with it*, Iſa. v. 4. *What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Mark vi. 6. 'tis ſaid *our Saviour marvell'd at the unbelief* of the Jews. And *chap.* xvi. 14. that *he upbraided his Diſciples with their unbelief and hardneſs of heart.* But why ſhould the repentance of ſinners be expected, or their unbelief marvell'd at, or indeed be upbraided to them, by him who knew it impoſſible to them, without an *irreſiſtible* power and grace, which he knew likewiſe was not afforded to them? neither God nor man have reaſon to wonder that any man does not do that, which at the ſame time they certainly know he cannot do.

The bottom of all that is ſaid to avoid this preſſing difficulty, is this, "that this impotence and diſability of ſinners is their ſin, and therefore cannot be pleaded in their "excuſe, for their impenitency; but God may ſtill juſtly require that of them, which "they had once a natural power to do, but wilfully forfeited and loſt it; they had "this power in *Adam*, and forfeited it by his diſobedience." To ſhew how ſlight this evaſion is, I need not run into that argument, how far we are guilty of the ſin of our firſt parents. That by that firſt tranſgreſſion and diſobedience all mankind ſuffers, and our natures are extremely corrupted and depraved, cannot be denied; but the corruption of our natures is a thing very different from perſonal guilt, ſtrictly and properly ſo call'd. I will take the buſineſs much ſhorter, and granting that mankind had in *Adam* a natural power to have continued obedient to the laws of God, yet ſince *by one man ſin enter'd into the world*, and *all are now ſinners*, here is an obligation to *repentance*, as well as to *obedience*, and men ſhall be condemned for their *impenitency*. I ask now, whether in *Adam* we had a power to *repent?* 'Tis certain *Adam* had not this power, and therefore I cannot ſee how we could loſe it, and forfeit it in him. *Adam* indeed had a natural power *not to have ſinned*, and ſo *not to have needed repentance*; but no power to *repent* in the ſtate of innocency, becauſe in that ſtate repentance was impoſſible, becauſe there could be no occaſion for it. He had it not after his fall, becauſe by that he forfeited all his power to that which is ſpiritually good. 'Tis ſaid indeed he had it in innocency, but forfeited it by his fall; ſo that he had it, when there was no occaſion or poſſibility of the exerciſe of it, and loſt it when there was occaſion for it: or if he did not loſe it by his fall, we have it ſtill, and then there is no need of any ſupernatural, much leſs *irreſiſtible* grace to *repentance*; ſo that our impotency, as to the particular duty of *repentance*, cannot be charg'd upon us, as our fault, not ſo much as upon the account of original ſin.

But the want of this power is the conſequent and juſt puniſhment of our firſt tranſgreſſion. Be it ſo; but if this impotency ſtill remain in all thoſe to whom God doth not afford his *irreſiſtible* grace, how comes the grace offer'd in the goſpel to aggravate the impenitency of men, and increaſe their condemnation? For if it be no remedy againſt this impotency, how comes it to inflame the guilt of impenitency? Or how is it grace to offer mercy to thoſe upon their repentance, who are out of a poſſibility of repenting; and yet to puniſh them more ſeverely for their impenitency after this offer made to them, which they cannot accept without that grace which God is reſolved not to afford them? If this be the caſe, the greateſt favour had been to have had no ſuch offer made to them, and it had been happier for mankind, that *the grace of God had* not *appear'd to all men*, but only to thoſe who ſhall *irreſiſtibly* be made partakers of the benefit of it.

Secondly, Another doctrine grounded upon this metaphor of *a new creation*, is, that we are *meerly paſſive* in the work of converſion and regeneration, and contribute nothing to it; that God does all, and we do nothing at all; and this follows from the former, eſpecially if we allow the metaphor as far as it will carry us. For as the firſt creation of things was by an *irreſiſtible* act of divine power, ſo the things that were made were only *paſſive* in their creation; and as they could make no reſiſtance, ſo neither could they contribute any thing to their being what they are. And this doctrine is not only argued from the metaphor of *a new creation*, but from ſeveral other metaphors uſed in ſcripture to deſcribe our natural ſtate; as namely, *darkneſs*, *blindneſs*, and our being *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*; from whence it is inferr'd, that we contribute no more to our renovation, than darkneſs doth to the introduction of light, than a blind man can do to the recovery of his ſight, or a dead man to his own reſurrection; but are *wholly paſſive* in this work. And to countenance this notion, they make great advantage of the character which is given in ſcripture of the moſt degenerate heathen, taking it for granted, that their condition is the true ſtandard of a natural and unregenerate ſtate; and to this purpoſe they inſiſt particularly upon that deſcription of the gentile idolaters, *Eph.* iv. 18, 19. *Having the underſtanding darken'd, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, becauſe of the blindneſs of their hearts; who being paſt feeling, have given themſelves over to laſciviouſneſs; to work all uncleanneſs with greedineſs.* Which is indeed a deſcription of men in their natural ſtate, but not of *all*, but of ſuch as by the worſt ſort of vicious practices of the groſſeſt idolatry, and moſt abominable lewdneſs, were degenerated to the utmoſt, ſo that their condition ſeemed deſperate, without a miraculous and extraordinary grace of God, which was probably afforded to many of theſe. In like manner they argue the common condition of mankind, from the deſcription which is given of the wickedneſs of men, before God brought the flood upon them. *Gen.* vi. 5. *God ſaw that the wickedneſs of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* This they make the character of *all men,* in their *natural* ſtate, whereas this is a deſcription of an *extraordinary* degeneracy of men, ſignifying that the world was then extremely bad, and depraved to the higheſt degree; for God gives this as a reaſon why he was reſolved to drown the world, and *to deſtroy man from the face of the earth,* becauſe *their wickedneſs was grown to ſo great an height.* But if this were a deſcription of the natural ſtate of mankind, this could be no particular reaſon for bringing a flood upon the world at that time, there being the ſame reaſon for it, for fifteen hundred years before, and ever will be the ſame reaſon to the end of the world, that is, that men are naturally corrupted and depraved. Surely they conſider the Scripture very ſuperficially, that interpret it at this rate.

'Tis true, that the nature of man is ſadly corrupted and depraved; but not ſo bad as by vicious practices and habits it may be made; all men are not equally at the ſame diſtance from the grace of God; ſome are *nearer to the kingdom of God* than others, and leſs force and violence will ſerve *to reſcue them from the power of Satan,* and *to tranſplant them into the kingdom of Chriſt.* The *prevalency* and *dominion of ſin* makes an *unregenerate* ſtate, as the *prevalency of grace* puts a man into a *regenerate* ſtate. An unregenerate man is not neceſſarily as bad as is poſſible, no more than it is neceſſary to a regenerate ſtate, that a man be perfectly good; ſo that it is a great miſtake to argue the common condition of all mankind, from the deſcriptions that are given in the ſcripture of the worſt of men; and therefore if it were granted that *irreſiſtible* grace were neceſſary for the converſion of *ſuch,* it will not follow that the ſame is neceſſary to *all.*

All unregenerate men are not equally devoid of a ſenſe of God, and ſpiritual things; they have many convictions of what they ought to be and do, and under thoſe convictions are very capable of perſuaſion, which dead men are not. The grace of God is neceſſary to the converſion of a ſinner, but it is not neceſſary that he ſhould be *only paſſive* in this work. Experience tells us the contrary, that we can do ſomething, that we can co-operate with the grace of God; and the ſcripture tells us the ſame, and makes it an argument and encouragement to us *to work out our own ſalvation,* becauſe *God works in us both to will and to do of his own goodneſs,* Phil. ii. 12, 13. Beſides, that it is the greateſt and juſteſt diſcouragement in the world to all endeavours of repentance and reformation, to tell men that they can do nothing in it. He that is ſure of this, that he can do nothing in this work, is a fool if he make any attempt to become better, becauſe he ſtruggles with an impoſſibility; and if the work will be done at all, it will be done without him, and he neither can nor ought to have any hand in it. But will any metaphor bear men out againſt ſo palpable an abſurdity as this?

And yet after all, there is no force in theſe metaphors, to prove what they aim at by them. For if to be *dead in ſin* ſignifies *an utter impotency to goodneſs,* then *to be dead to ſin* muſt on the contrary ſignify an *impoſſiblity of ſinning*; for juſt as the *unregenerate* man is *dead in ſin,* ſo he that is *regenerate* is ſaid in ſcripture to be *dead to ſin:* But yet the beſt of regenerate men, notwithſtanding they are *dead to ſin,* and *alive to God, do offend in many things,* and too frequently fall into ſin. Why then ſhould the metaphor be ſo ſtrong on the one ſide, that a man who is ſaid to be *dead in ſin,* ſhould not be able ſo much as to *co-operate* with the grace of God in the work of repentance and converſion?

In ſhort, if this be true, that men in an unregenerate and unconverted ſtate are perfectly *dead,* and have no more ſenſe of ſpiritual things than a dead man hath of natural objects, then all precepts and exhortations to repentance, and all promiſes and threatenings to argue and perſuade men thereto are vain, and to no purpoſe; and it would be every whit as proper and reaſonable for us to preach in the *church-yard,* over the graves of dead men, as in the *church* to the unregenerate; becauſe they can no more act and move towards their own recovery, out of a ſtate of ſin and death, than the dead bodies can riſe out of their graves.

But it is ſaid, that the end of exhortations and promiſes is not to declare to men their *power,* but their *duty.* But if they be *inſenſible,* it is to as little purpoſe to declare to them their *duty,* as their *power.* Beſides, it will be an hard thing to convince men that any thing is their *duty,* which at the ſame time we declare to them to be *out of their power.*

But this is *Pelagianiſm*, to ſay that of ourſelves we can repent and turn to God. And who ſays we can *of ourſelves* do this, beſides the *Pelagians?* we affirm the neceſſity of God's grace hereto, and withal the neceſſity of our *co-operating* with the grace of God. We ſay that without the powerful excitation and aid of God's grace, no man can repent and turn to God; but we ſay likewiſe, that God cannot be properly ſaid to *aid* and *aſſiſt* thoſe, who do nothing themſelves.

But men *can do more than they do*, and therefore are juſtly condemned. Not in the work of converſion ſure; if they can do *nothing at all.* But they can do more by way of *preparation* towards it. Suppoſe they do all they can towards it, will this ſave them, or will God upon this *irreſiſtibly* work their converſion? no, they ſay, notwithſtanding any preparatory work that we can do, converſion may not follow; how then does this mend the matter?

But ſtill they ſay the fault is in mens want of *will*, and not of *power*; *you will not come unto me, that ye might have life.* But can they *will* to come? no, that they cannot neither. Why then it is ſtill want of *power* that hinders them. The offer of life is a very gracious offer to them that are guilty, and liable to death, as we all are; but not if the condition be utterly impoſſible to us, tho' the impoſſibility ſprings from our own fault, as I will plainly ſhew by a fair inſtance. A Prince offers a pardon to a traitor faſt lock'd in chains, if he will come to him and ſubmit himſelf; but if he be ſtill detained in chains, and the Prince do not ſome way or other help him to his liberty, 'tis ſo far from being *a favour* to offer him a pardon upon theſe terms, that it is a *cruel deriſion* of his miſery, to ſay to him, *you will not come to me that you may be pardoned*; and this notwithſtanding that his being caſt into chains was the effect of his own crime and fault; the application is obvious. I ſhould now proceed to anſwer an objection or two, and then to give a clear ſtate of this matter, ſo as is moſt agreeable to ſcripture, and the attributes and perfections of God; but this I ſhall reſerve for another diſcourſe.

The Third Sermon on this Text.

SERMON LIV.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Neceſſity, in order to Juſtification and Salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion; but a new Creature.

THE point which I am upon from theſe words is, that *according to the terms of the Goſpel, nothing will avail to our Juſtification, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives.*

For the full explication of this, I propounded to ſhew,

Firſt, What is implied in this expreſſion of the *new creature.*

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God.

Thirdly, That it is highly reaſonable that this ſhould be the condition of our juſtification.

In ſpeaking to the firſt of theſe, I have ſhewed, 1*ſt*, What this metaphor doth certainly import; and 2*dly*, that it doth not import what ſome would extend it to, whereon to found ſuch doctrines as theſe:

Firſt, That as the Creation was an *irreſiſtible* act of the divine Power, ſo is this *new creation*, or the converſion of a ſinner.

Secondly, As creatures were *meerly paſſive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we in our converſion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation of the ſeveral kinds and ranks of creatures was effected *in an inſtant*, by the powerful word of God, ſaying, *let ſuch and ſuch things be*, and immediately they were; ſo this *new creation* is *in an inſtant*, and admits of no degrees.

The *firſt* of theſe I have conſider'd, and enter'd upon the *ſecond*; namely, that as the creatures were *meerly paſſive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we in our converſion and regeneration.

This I told you does plainly make void all the precepts and exhortations, and all the promiſes and threatnings of ſcripture, to argue and perſuade men to repentance.

That which remains to be done upon this argument, is,

Firſt, To anſwer an objection or two, which are commonly urged by the aſſertors of this doctrine, that we are *meerly paſſive* in the work of converſion.

Secondly, To give a clear ſtate of this matter, ſo as is moſt agreeable to ſcripture, and the attributes and perfections of God. For the

Firſt, The objections are theſe *three*.

1. That if we be not *meerly paſſive* in the work of regeneration and converſion, we aſcribe the whole glory of this work to ourſelves, and not to God.

Or, 2*dly*, We do however extenuate or leſſen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours of our own towards this change.

3*dly*, They ask St. *Paul*'s queſtion, *who maketh thee to differ?* and think it impoſſible to be anſwered, if the efficacy of God's grace do depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. Theſe are all the material objections I know; to every one of which I hope to give a very clear and ſufficient anſwer.

1. *Objection*. If we be not *meerly paſſive* in the work of regeneration and converſion, we aſcribe the whole glory of this work to ourſelves, and not to God. But that I certainly know this objection is commonly made, and have ſeen it in very conſiderable Authors, I could not believe that men of ſo good ſenſe could make it. For this is to ſay, that if we do any thing in this work, tho' we acknowledge that what we do in it, we do by the aſſiſtance of God's Grace, we aſcribe it wholly to ourſelves, and rob God altogether of the glory of his grace; or in plainer terms, it is to ſay, that tho' we ſay God does never ſo much, and we but very little in this work, yet if we do not ſay that God does *all*, and we *nothing at all*, we take the whole work to ourſelves, and ſay God does *nothing at all*; which let any one that conſiders what we ſay, judge whether we ſay ſo or no.

The Scripture, which never robs God of the glory of his grace, does I'm ſure aſcribe our converſion and repentance, our regeneration and ſanctification to ſeveral cauſes; to the holy Spirit of God, to his Miniſters, to his Word, and to ourſelves. To the holy Spirit of God, as the principal author, and efficient. Hence we are ſaid *to be born of the Spirit, to be ſanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt*. To the Miniſters of *God*, as the inſtruments of our converſion. Hence they are ſaid *to turn men to righteouſneſs, to convert a ſinner from the evil of his ways, to ſave ſouls from death, to ſave themſelves, and them that hear them*; *to be our ſpiritual fathers, and to beget us in Chriſt*. To the word of God, as the ſubordinate means and inſtruments of our converſion. Hence we are ſaid *to be begotten by the word of truth, to be ſanctified by the truth*. And laſtly, to ourſelves, as concurring ſome way or other to this work. Hence we are ſaid *to believe and repent, to turn from our evil ways* and *to turn to the Lord, to cleanſe and purify ourſelves*. Hence likewiſe are thoſe frequent commands in ſcripture, *to amend our ways and doings, to waſh our hearts from wickedneſs, to repent and turn ourſelves, and to make ourſelves new hearts and new ſpirits*. So that all theſe cauſes, the Spirit of God, his Miniſters, his Word, and we ourſelves, do all ſome way or other concur and contribute to this effect. God indeed is the principal, and hath ſo great an hand in this work from beginning to end, that all the reſt are nothing in compariſon, and we do well to aſcribe to him the whole glory of it, *that no fleſh may glory in his ſight*: But nevertheleſs in ſtrictneſs of ſpeech, ſufficiently warranted by ſcripture, the miniſters of God, and the word of God, and we ourſelves do all *co-operate* ſome way or other to our converſion, and regeneration; and by aſcribing to any of theſe ſuch parts as they truly have in this work, God is not robbed of *any part* of the glory of his grace, much leſs of the *whole*. Much leſs is it the aſcribing it all to ourſelves, whom we affirm to have *the leaſt part* in it, nor worthy to be mention'd, in compariſon of *the riches of God's*

God's grace towards us. And yet unleſs we do *ſomething*, what can be the meaning of *making ourſelves new hearts, and new ſpirits?* Is it only that we ſhould be *paſſive* to the *irreſiſtible* operations of God's grace? that is, that we ſhould not hinder, what we can neither hinder nor promote; that we ſhould ſo demean ourſelves, as of neceſſity we muſt whether we will or no. So then *to make ourſelves new hearts and new ſpirits*, is to do nothing at all towards the hindrance or furtherance of this work; and if this be the meaning of it, it is a precept and exhortation juſt as fit for *ſtones*, as for men; that is, very improper for either.

2. *Objection*. But however, we do extenuate and leſſen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours on our part towards this change. For anſwer to this, *three* things deſerve to be conſider'd.

Firſt, It is very well worthy our conſideration, that they who make this objection, have the confidence to pretend that *they* do not diminiſh the grace of God, by confining it to a very ſmall part of mankind in compariſon; nay, they will needs face us down, that by this very thing they do very much exalt and magnify it, and that the grace of God is ſo much the greater, by how much the fewer they are that are partakers of it. But I hope they only mean that the grace is greater to themſelves; (in which conceit there is commonly as much of envy as gratitude) but ſurely they cannot mean that the grace which is limited to a few, is greater in itſelf, and upon the whole matter, than that which is extended to a great many; it being a downright contradiction, to ſay that the grace of God is magnified by being confined. For at this rate of reaſoning, the leſſer it is, the greater it muſt be, and by undeniable conſequence would be greateſt of all, if it were none at all. So that it ſeems the grace of God may be extenuated in favour of ourſelves, but when we do ſo we muſt *ſay* we magnify it.

Secondly, But to come cloſe to the objection; tho' it be true, that if God's grace in our converſion do not do all, it does not do ſo much as if it did all; yet this is really no injury or diſhonour to the grace of God; and tho' in ſome ſenſe it doth extenuate it, it doth not in truth and reality take off from the glory of it. In my opinion, the grace and ſavour of a Prince is not the leſs in offering a pardon to a traitor, who puts forth his hand and gladly receives it, than if he forc'd it upon him whether he would or no. I am ſure, it is in the firſt caſe much fitter to give it, and he on whom it is conferr'd much better qualified to receive it. 'Tis no diſparagement to a Prince's favour, that it is beſtow'd on one who is in ſome meaſure qualified to receive it. But be it more or leſs in one caſe than the other, this is certain, that in both caſes the man owes his life to the great grace and goodneſs of his Prince; and I cannot ſee how it leſſens the grace, that the miſerable object of it, the guilty and condemned perſon, was either by his humble ſubmiſſion, or thankful acceptance of it, in ſome degree better qualified to receive ſuch a favour, than an obſtinate refuſer of it.

Thirdly, which is the principal conſideration of all, We muſt take great heed, that while we endeavour to make God to do *all* in the converſion of ſinners, we do not by this means charge upon him the ruin and deſtruction of impenitent ſinners, which I doubt we ſhould do, if we make the reaſon of their impenitency and ruin their utter impotency and diſability to repent; and we certainly make this the reaſon of their impenitency and ruin, if there be no other difference but this between penitent and impenitent ſinners, namely, that in the one God works repentance by an *irreſiſtible* act of his power, ſo that he cannot but repent, and denies this grace to the other, without which he cannot poſſibly repent. But the ſcripture chargeth the deſtruction of men upon themſelves, and lays their impenitency at their own door. *O Iſrael! thou haſt deſtroyed thyſelf*; *but in me is thy help*, Hoſea xiii. 9. But *where* is the *help*, when the grace abſolutely neceſſary to repentance is denied? And how is *their deſtruction of themſelves*, if it is unavoidable, let them do what they can? *Iſa*. v. 3, 4. God appeals to his people *Iſrael* that nothing was wanting on his part, that was fit and neceſſary to be done, that they might bring forth the fruits of repentance, and better obedience: *And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Is it true that God hath done all that was neceſſary, to have brought them to repentance? Then if *irreſiſtible* grace be neceſſary, he afforded them *that*; but *that* was not afforded them, becauſe then they muſt unavoidably have repented, and there had been no cauſe for this complaint: If he did not afford it, but only the *outward means* of repentance without the *inward grace* (as ſome ſay;) then it is eaſy *to judge* why *they did not* repent; becauſe *they could not*; and there ſeems to be no cauſe either of wonder, or complaint. Beſides that it will be hard to juſtify that ſaying, *What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* when it is acknowledg'd by the aſſertors of this doctrine, that the main thing was not done, and that without which all the reſt ſignify'd nothing, leaving them under the ſame impoſſibility of repentance, as if nothing at all had been done to them.

But now upon *our* ſuppoſition, that *ſufficient grace* was afforded to them, which they wilfully neglected to make uſe of, the reaſon and equity of this complaint is evident, and God is acquitted, as having done what was needful on his part, and the ſinner juſtly condemned, for not concurring with the grace of God as he might have done; which ſhews that we are not *meerly paſſive* in this work; but ſomething is expected from us, after God hath done his part, which if we neglect to do, *our deſtruction is of ourſelves.* Whereas the contrary ſuppoſition, upon pretence of glorifying God's *grace*, by making him to do *all* in the converſion of ſinners, indangers the honour of his *juſtice*, by laying the impenitency of ſinners, and their ruin conſequent upon it, at his door; which is to advance one attribute of God upon the ruin of another; whereas it is a fundamental principle of religion, to take care to reconcile the attributes and perfections of God to one another; for that is not a divine perfection, which contradicts any other perfection.

The 3*d Objection* is grounded upon that queſtion of St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* iv. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ?* which they think impoſſible to be anſwer'd, if the efficacy of God's grace depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. For, ſay they, when God offers his grace to two perſons for their repentance, if the true reaſon why the one repents, and the other remains impenitent, be this, that the one complieth with this grace of God, and yieldeth to it, the other reſiſts and ſtands out againſt it; then it is not the grace of God which makes the difference, for *that* is equal to both, but ſomething in themſelves, and ſo it is not *God that makes them to differ*, but *they themſelves.*

But this queſtion is impertinent to this caſe. The Apoſtle ſpeaks it concerning ſpiritual gifts, upon account of which, they factiouſly admir'd ſome of the Apoſtles above others, and concerning *them* the queſtion is very proper, *who maketh thee to differ?* Miraculous gifts were ſo order'd by God, that men were *meerly paſſive* in the receiving of them, and contributed nothing to the obtaining of them; and therefore if one had greater gifts than another, it was meerly the pleaſure of God that made the difference. But the caſe is not the ſame in the graces of God's Spirit, towards the obtaining and improving whereof we ourſelves may contribute ſomething; our Saviour having aſſured us, that *to him that hath, ſhall be given.* And here the queſtion is not proper, nor is it true *that the grace of God makes all the difference.* It is indeed the foundation of all the good that is in us: but our different improvement makes different attainments in grace and goodneſs. Among thoſe to whom the talents were intruſted, what *made the difference* between the man *who wrapt his talent in the napkin, and buried it*, and thoſe *who gained double by theirs*, but that *the one* improv'd the grace confer'd on him, *the other* neglected it, and this without any manner of reflection upon, or diminution of the grace of God, or any danger from St. *Paul*'s queſtion, *who maketh thee to differ?* Put the caſe, a pardon is offer'd to two malefactors, the one accepts, the other refuſes it; *their own choice makes the difference between them*; but he that is ſaved is nevertheleſs beholden to the king's pardon for his life; and it were a ſenſeleſs ingratitude in him, becauſe he accepts the pardon, when the other refuſeth it, to ſay that he did not owe his life to the grace and favour of his Prince, but might thank himſelf for it; whereas that he was in a capacity to accept a pardon, was wholly due to the clemency of his Prince, who offered it to him when he no wiſe deſerved it. In this caſe the thing plainly appears as it is, by which every man may ſee, that it is againſt common ſenſe to pretend that the grace of God is deſtroyed, if there be any compliance on our part with it; that it is no grace, if it be not forc'd upon us, and we be not *meerly paſſive* in the reception of it. I proceed in the

Second place, to give a clear ſtate of this matter, ſo as is moſt agreeable to the doctrine of the holy Scriptures, and the eſſential attributes and perfections of God. In order to which, I will give you a ſhort view of the ſeveral opinions concerning this matter. And there are two *extreme*, and two *middle* opinions, concerning the operation of God's grace in the converſion of a ſinner.

The *firſt* of the *extreme* opinions is, that which all this while I have been arguing againſt, namely, that all that are converted and regenerated, are wrought upon in an *irreſiſtible* manner, and are *meerly paſſive* in it; and that thoſe who are not thus wrought upon, their repentance and converſion is *impoſſible.* What the inconveniencies of this opinion are, I have ſhewed at large.

The other *extreme* opinion is, that none are thus wrought upon, becauſe it would be a violence and injury to man's natural liberty; but that *ſufficient grace* is offered to all, one time or other, who live under the Goſpel, which they may comply with or reſiſt, and conſequently if they be not brought to repentance, their impenitency and ruin is the effect of their own choice, and God is *free from the blood of all men.* But this opinion, tho' infinitely more reaſonable than the other, ſeems not to have any neceſſary foundation either in ſcripture or reaſon. There are ſome inſtances in ſcripture of the converſion of men after a very *violent*, if not an *irreſiſtible* manner, which ſeems to be attributed to a particular *predeſtination* of God; as *that* of St. *Paul*, who ſays of himſelf, *Gal.* i. 15. that *he was ſeparated from his mother's womb to that work to which he was called*; and the manner of his converſion was anſwerable to ſuch a *predeſtination*; and there is nothing in reaſon againſt this, ſince it is no injury to any man to be made good and happy againſt his will.

The two *middle* opinions are theſe.

Firſt, That *irreſiſtible grace* is afforded to *all the elect*, and *ſufficient grace* to all others who live under the Goſpel (for of thoſe only we ſpeak, the caſe of others being peculiar, and belonging to the extraordinary mercy of God) but then they ſay, that none of thoſe to whom this *ſufficient grace* is afforded ſhall effectually comply with it and be ſaved. This opinion ſeems more moderate, and hath this advantage in it, that it acquits the juſtice of God in the condemnation of thoſe, who having *ſufficient grace* afforded to them, did yet notwithſtanding continue impenitent; but yet it hath two great inconveniencies in it.

Firſt, That this ſuppoſition is to no purpoſe, as to any real effect for the ſalvation of men, becauſe not one perſon more is ſaved, notwithſtanding this *univerſal ſufficient grace*, which they ſay is afforded to all; for they take it for granted it is never *effectual*; and then it ſeems very unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that a means *ſufficient* to its end ſhould *univerſally* prove *ineffectual*; nay, on the contrary, it is next to a demonſtration againſt the *ſufficiency* of a means, if *perpetually* and *in all inſtances* it fails of its end. This would tempt any man to think that ſurely there is ſome defect in it, or ſomething that hinders the efficacy of it; if being *perpetually* and *generally* afforded, it doth *perpetually* and *univerſally* miſcarry, without ſo much as *one inſtance* among ſo many millions to the contrary. So that this opinion ſeems rather to be contriv'd for a colour and ſhelter againſt ſome abſurdity, which men know not how to avoid otherwiſe, than to ſerve any good purpoſe, or to be embraced for the truth and probability of it.

The other *middle* opinion is, that ſome are converted in an *irreſiſtible* manner, when God pleaſeth, and whom he deſigns to be extraordinary examples, and inſtruments for the good of others, and that *ſufficient grace* is afforded to others, which is *effectual* to the ſalvation of *many*, and *rejected* by *a great many.* And this avoids all the inconveniency of the other opinion, and is evidently moſt agreeable both to the tenor of Scripture and to the beſt notions which men have concerning the attributes and perfections of God, and gives greateſt encouragement to the endeavours of men. It agrees very well with the ſolemn declarations of Scripture, that God is not wanting on his part, to afford men ſufficient means to bring them to repentance; that he *deſires not the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live*; that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*; that *he would not that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance*; that *mens deſtruction is of themſelves.* And this makes all the exhortations and motives of Scripture to repentance to be of ſome force and ſignificancy, and gives encouragement to the reſolutions and endeavours of men to become better. This clearly acquits the juſtice of God in the condemnation of impenitent ſinners, and fixeth the reaſon of their ruin upon their own choice. This perfectly reconciles the operation and aſſiſtance of God's grace in our converſion and regeneration, in our ſanctification and perſeverance in a good courſe, with the concurrence of our own endeavours, and makes thoſe plain texts of Scripture have ſome ſenſe and ſignificancy in them; *Work out your own ſalvation*; *Repent and turn yourſelves from all your evil ways*; *Make ye new hearts* *and new ſpirits.* Theſe are more than a thouſand metaphors to convince a man, that we may and ought to do ſomething towards our repentance and converſion. And if any man be ſure that we neither do nor can do any thing in this work, then I am ſure that theſe texts ſignify nothing. Finally thoſe texts which ſpeak moſt clearly of the neceſſity of the divine grace and aſſiſtance, to our doing of any thing that is ſpiritually good, do ſuppoſe ſomething to be done on our part. That of our Saviour, *without me you can do nothing*, implies that *with* his grace and aſſiſtance *we can.* That of St. *Paul*, *I am able to do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthning me*, implies, that what we do *by the ſtrength of Chriſt* is truly *our own act*; *I am able to do all things.* And this does not in the leaſt prejudice nor obſcure the glory of God's grace. St. *Paul* it ſeems knew very well how to reconcile theſe two, and to give the grace of God its due, without rejecting all concurrence of our own induſtry and endeavour, 1 *Cor.* xv. 10. *But by the grace of God I am what I am*; *and his grace which was beſtowed upon me was not in vain*; not becauſe it was *irreſiſtible*, and he *meerly paſſive* in the reception of it; but becauſe he did *concur* and *co-operate* with it. So he tells us, *his grace that was beſtowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all*; *yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* So that our concurrence and endeavour in the doing of any thing that is good, does not derogate from the grace of God, provided that we aſcribe the good which we do to the aſſiſtance of divine grace, to which it is incomparably more due than to our own activity and endeavour. And ſo St. *Paul* does, *I labour'd abundantly*; *yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

So that the glory of God's grace may be advanced to its due pitch, without aſſerting that we are *meerly paſſive* to the operations of it. God's grace may be *abundantly beſtowed* upon us, and yet we may *labour abundantly*; *God may work in us to will and to do*, and yet *we may work out our own ſalvation.* I have done with the *ſecond doctrine* grounded upon this metaphor of *a new creature.*

SERMON LV.

The Fourth Sermon on this Text.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Neceſſity, in order to Juſtification and Salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion; but a new Creature.

IN diſcourſing on theſe words, that which I was laſt upon was to ſhew, that this metaphor of a *new creature* doth not import what ſome would extend it to, and that ſo as to found doctrines of great conſequence upon the ſingle ſtrength of this, and other like metaphors, *viz.* ſuch doctrines as theſe *three:*

Firſt, That as the creation was by an *irreſiſtible* act of the divine power, ſo is this *new creation*, or the converſion of a ſinner.

Secondly, That as creatures were *meerly paſſive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we to our converſion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation was *in an inſtant*, only by the powerful word of God, ſo this new creation is *in an inſtant*, and admits of *no degrees.* The *two* firſt of theſe I have ſpoken to, and ſhewed, that as they had no neceſſary foundation in this and the like metaphors of Scripture, ſo they are contrary to reaſon and experience, and the plain and conſtant tenor of Scripture, which is the rule and meaſure of Christ's doctrine. I proceed now to conſider the

Third doctrine which is grounded upon this metaphor, namely, that as the creation of the ſeveral ranks and orders of creatures was *in an inſtant*, and effected by the powerful word of God, ſaying, *let ſuch and ſuch things be*, and immediately they were; ſo this *new creation* is *in an inſtant*, and admits of *no ſteps and degrees*. And this doctrine is nothing elſe but a farther purſuit of the metaphor; and admitting the *two* former doctrines to be true, and well grounded upon this metaphor, this *third* doctrine follows well enough from them, for it is agreeable enough, that that which is effected by an *irreſiſtible* act of omnipotence, without any concurrence or operation on our part, ſhould be done *in an inſtant* and *all at once*. Not that this is neceſſary, but that it is reaſonable; for why ſhould omnipotence uſe delays, and take time and proceed *by degrees* in the doing of that, which with the ſame eaſe it can do *at once*, and *in an inſtant*; eſpecially conſidering how well this ſuits with the other metaphors of ſcripture, as well as with this of *a new creation*, *viz.* the metaphor of *regeneration* and *reſurrection*. A child is born *at once*, and the dead ſhall be raiſed *in a moment*, *in the twinkling of an eye*.

But notwithſtanding all this plauſible appearance and conſpiracy of metaphors, I ſhall ſhew that this doctrine of the converſion and regeneration of a ſinner being effected *in an inſtant*, and *all at once*, is not well grounded either upon ſcripture, or experience. Not but that God can do ſo if he pleaſeth, and works this change in ſome much ſooner and quicker than in others; but there is nothing either in ſcripture or experience to perſuade us that this is the *uſual*, much leſs the *conſtant* and *unalterable* method of God's grace in the converſion of a ſinner, to bring it about *in an inſtant*, without any ſenſible *ſteps* and *degrees*.

But for the full clearing of this matter, I ſhall proceed by theſe ſteps:

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew upon what miſtaken grounds and principles this doctrine relies, beſides the metaphors already mention'd, which I have ſhewn to be of no force to prove the thing.

Secondly, I ſhall plainly ſhew what *regeneration* is; by which it will appear, that it is not *neceſſarily* effected *in an inſtant*, and *at once*, but admits of *degrees*.

Thirdly, That it is evidently ſo in experience of the *ordinary* method of God's grace, both in thoſe who are regenerated by a pious and religious education, and in thoſe who are reclaimed from a vicious courſe of life.

Fourthly, That all this is very conſonant and agreeable to what the ſcripture plainly and conſtantly declares concerning it.

Firſt, I ſhall diſcover ſeveral miſtakes upon which this doctrine is grounded, beſides the metaphors already mention'd, and which I have ſhewn to be of no force to prove the thing, *viz.* That regeneration is *in an inſtant*, and admits of *no degrees*. As,

1. That *regeneration* and *ſanctification* are not only different expreſſions, but do ſignify *two* things really different. But this is a groſs miſtake; for *regeneration* and *ſanctification* are but different expreſſions of the ſelf-ſame thing; for *regeneration* is a metaphor which the ſcripture uſeth to expreſs our *tranſlation* and *change from one ſtate to another*, from a ſtate of ſin and wickedneſs, to a ſtate of grace and holineſs, as if we were *born over again*, and were the *children of another father*, and from being *the children of the devil*, did become *the children of God*; and *ſanctification* is our being *made holy*, our being *purified* and *cleanſed* from ſin and impurity. And hence it is that *regeneration* and *ſanctification* are attributed to the ſame cauſes, principal, and inſtrumental, to *the Spirit of God*, and to *the word of God*; we are ſaid *to be born of the Spirit*, and to be *ſanctified by the holy Ghoſt*; *to be begotten of the word of truth*, and *to be ſanctified by the truth*, which is *the word of God*. So that the ſcripture ſpeaks of them as the ſame thing; and they muſt needs be ſo; for if *ſanctification* be the making of us holy, and *regeneration* maketh us *holy*; then *regeneration* is *ſanctification*.

2. It is ſaid, that *regeneration* only ſignifies our *firſt entrance* into this ſtate, and *ſanctification* our *progreſs* and *continuance* in it. But this likewiſe is a great miſtake. For tho' it be true, that *regeneration* doth ſignify our *firſt entrance* into this ſtate, yet it is not true, that it *only* ſignifies that; for it is uſed likewiſe in ſcripture to ſignify our *continuance* in that ſtate; for Chriſtians are ſaid to be the *children of God*, and conſequently in a *regenerate* ſtate, not only in the *inſtant* of this change, but during their *continuance* in it. Beſides that our *firſt change* is as well call'd our *ſanctification* as our *progreſs* and *continuance* in a ſtate of holineſs. So that neither in this is there any difference between *regeneration* and *ſanctification*. They do both of them ſignify both our *firſt entrance* into an holy ſtate, and our *continuance* and progreſs in it; tho' *regeneration* do more *frequently* denote the *making* of this change, and our *firſt entrance* into it.

3. It is ſaid that one of the main differences between *regeneration* and *ſanctification* is this, that *regeneration* is incapable of *degrees*, and all that are regenerate are *equally* ſo, and one regenerate perſon is not *more or leſs regenerate* than another; whereas *ſanctification* is *a gradual progreſs* from one degree of holineſs to another, and of them that are truly ſanctified and holy, one may be *more ſanctified* and *more holy* than another. But this likewiſe is a meer fancy and imagination, without any real ground. For as an *unregenerate* ſtate does plainly admit of *degrees*, ſo likewiſe doth the *regenerate*, and for the ſame reaſon. That an *unregenerate* ſtate admits of *degrees*, is evident, in that ſome unregenerate perſons are *more wicked* than others, and thereby *more the children of wrath*, and *the Devil*, than others, which are the ſcripture expreſſions concerning the *degrees* of mens wickedneſs and impiety. In like manner, they that are *more holy*, and *more like God*, are *more the children of God*; and to be *more a child of God*, is ſurely to be more *regenerate*, that is, *more renewed after the image of God*, which conſiſts *in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*. So that it is a meer precarious aſſertion, and evidently falſe to affirm, that *regeneration* doth not admit of *degrees*, and that one is not *more regenerate* than another.

4thly, and laſtly, They ground this conceit upon the doctrine of the ſchools, which teach, that in *regeneration* and *converſion* all the habits of grace are infuſed, *ſimul & ſemel, together and at once*. I confeſs I have no regard, much leſs a veneration for the doctrine of *the ſchools*, where it differs from that of *the holy ſcriptures*, which ſay not one word of *infuſed habits*, which yet are much talk'd of in divinity; and to ſpeak the truth, theſe words ſerve only to obſcure the thing. For to ſay that in *converſion* the *habits* of all graces and virtues are *infuſed together and at once*, is to ſay, that *in an inſtant* men that were vicious before in ſeveral kinds, are by an omnipotent act of God's grace, and by a new principle infuſed into them, endued with the habits of the contrary graces and virtues, and are as chaſte, and temperate, and juſt, and meek, and humble, as if by the frequent practice of theſe virtues they had become ſo. That this *may be*, and *ſometimes* is, I am ſo far from denying, that I believe it to be ſo. Some men, by an *extraordinary* power of God's grace upon their hearts, are *ſuddenly changed*, and ſtrangely reclaimed from a very wicked and vicious, to a very religious and virtuous courſe of life; and that which others attain to by ſlower degrees, and great conflicts with themſelves, before they can gain the upper hand of their luſts, theſe arrive at *all on a ſudden*, by a mighty reſolution wrought in them by the power of God's grace, and as it were a new bias and inclination put upon their ſouls, equal to an habit gain'd by long uſe and cuſtom. This God *ſometimes* does, and when he does this, it may in ſome ſenſe be call'd *the infuſion of the habits of grace and virtue together, and at once*; becauſe the man is hereby endowed with a principle of equal force and power with habits that are acquir'd by long uſe and practice. A ſtrong and vigorous faith is the principle and root of all graces and virtues, and may have ſuch a powerful influence upon the reſolutions of our minds, and the government of our actions, that from this principle all graces and virtues may ſpring and grow up by degrees into habits; but then this principle is not *formally* but *virtually*, in the power and efficacy of it, *the infuſion of the habits of every grace and virtue*; and even in thoſe perſons in whom this change is ſo *ſuddenly*, and as it were *at once*, I doubt not but that the habits of ſeveral graces and virtues are afterwards attained by the frequent practice of them, in the virtue of this powerful principle of the faith of the Goſpel, as I ſhall ſhew in the progreſs of this diſcourſe. And this I doubt not was very frequent and viſible in many of the firſt converts to Chriſtianity; eſpecially of thoſe, who from the abominable idolatry and impiety of heatheniſm were gained to the chriſtian religion. The Spirit of God did then work very miraculouſly, as well in the cures of ſpiritual as of bodily diſeaſes. But then to make this the rule and ſtandard of God's ordinary proceedings in the converſion and regeneration of men, is equally unreaſonable, as ſtill to expect miracles for the cure of diſeaſes; and 'tis certain in experience, that this is not God's *ordinary* method in the converſion of ſinners, as I ſhall fully ſhew by and by.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew what *regeneration* is, by which it will plainly appear, that there is no neceſſity that it ſhould be effected *in an inſtant*, and *at once*, but that it will admit of *degrees*. I do not deny that it may be *in an inſtant*, and *at once*. The power of God is able to do this, and *ſometimes* does it *very throoughly*, and *very ſuddenly*. But the queſtion is, whether there be *a neceſſity* it ſhould be ſo, and *always* be ſo. Now *regeneration* is *the change of a man's ſtate, from a ſtate of ſin to a ſtate of holineſs*; which becauſe it is an entrance upon a new kind or courſe of life, it is fitly reſembled to *regeneration*, or *a new birth*; to *a new creation*, the man being as it were *quite chang'd* or *made over again*, ſo as not to be, as to the main purpoſe and deſign of his life, *the ſame man* he was before. This is a plain ſenſible account of the thing, which every one may eaſily underſtand. Now there is nothing in reaſon, why a man may not *gradually* be changed and arrive at this ſtate *by degrees*; as well as after this change is made, and he arrived at this ſtate of a regenerate man, he may *by degrees* grow and improve in it. But *the latter* no man doubts of, but that a man that is in a ſtate of grace, may *grow* and *improve* in grace; and there is as little reaſon to queſtion why a man may not *come to this ſtate by degrees*, as well as *leap into it at once*.

All the difficulty I know of in this matter, is a meer nicety, that there is *an inſtant* in which every thing begins, and therefore *regeneration* is *in an inſtant*; ſo that the inſtant before the man arrived at this ſtate, it could not be ſaid *that he was regenerate*; and the inſtant after he is in this ſtate, it cannot be denied that he is ſo. But this is idle ſubtilty, juſt as if a man ſhould prove that an houſe was built *in an inſtant*, becauſe it could not be ſaid *to be built*, 'till the inſtant it was *finiſh'd*; tho' for all this, nothing is more certain than that it was built *by degrees*. Or, ſuppoſe the time of arriving at man's eſtate be at *one and twenty*, does it from hence follow, that a man does not grow to be a man *by degrees*, but is made a man *in an inſtant*; becauſe juſt before *one and twenty* he was not at man's eſtate, and juſt then he was? Not but that God, if he pleaſe, can make a man *in an inſtant*, as he did *Adam*; but it is not neceſſary from this example, that all men ſhould be made ſo, much leſs does it follow from this vain ſubtilty. This is juſt the caſe. All the while the man is tending towards a regenerate ſtate, and is ſtruggling with his luſts, 'till by the power of God's grace, and his own reſolution, he get the victory; all the while he is under the ſenſe and conviction of his ſinful and miſerable ſtate, and ſorrowing for the folly of his paſt life, and coming to an effectual purpoſe and reſolution of changing his courſe; and it may be ſeveral times thrown back by the temptations of the devil, and the power of evil habits, and the weakneſs and inſtability of his own purpoſe; 'till at laſt, by the grace of God following and aſſiſting him, he comes to a firm reſolution of a better life, which reſolution governs him for the future; I ſay all this while, which in ſome perſons is longer, in others ſhorter, according to the power of evil habits, and the different degrees of God's grace afforded to men; all this time the work of *regeneration* is *going on*; and tho' a man cannot be ſaid *to be in a regenerate ſtate*, 'till that very *inſtant* that the principle of grace and his good reſolution have got the upper hand of his luſts; yet it is certain for all this, that the work of *regeneration* was not *effected in an inſtant*. This is plainly and truly the caſe, as I ſhall ſhew in the

Third particular I propounded, namely, that it is evident from experience of the *ordinary* methods of God's grace, both in thoſe who are regenerate by a pious and religious education, and thoſe who are reclaimed from a vicious courſe of life.

The firſt ſort, namely thoſe who are brought to goodneſs by a religious and virtuous education; theſe (at leaſt, ſo far as my obſervation reacheth) make up a very conſiderable part of the number of the *regenerate*, that is, of *good men*. And tho' it be certain, conſidering the univerſal corruption and degeneracy of human nature, that there is a real change made in them, by the operation of God's grace upon their minds, yet it is as certain in experience, that this change is made in very many, by very *ſilent* and *inſenſible degrees*, 'till at length the ſeeds of religion, which were planted in them by a good education, do viſibly prevail over all the evil inclinations of corrupt nature, ſo as to ſway and govern the actions of their lives; and when the principles of grace and goodneſs do *apparently prevail*, we may conclude them *to be in a regenerate ſtate*, tho' perhaps very few of theſe can give any account of the particular time and occaſion of this change. For things may be ſeen in their *effect*, which were never very ſenſible in their *cauſe*. And it is very reaſonable, that ſuch perſons who never lived in any evil courſe ſhould eſcape thoſe pangs and terrors which unavoidably happen unto others, from a courſe of actual ſin, and the guilt of a wicked life; and if there be any ſuch perſons as I have deſcribed, who are in this *gradual* and *inſenſible* manner regenerated, and made good, this is a demonſtration, that there is *no neceſſity* that this change ſhould be *in an inſtant*, it being ſo frequently found to be otherwiſe in experience.

And as for others, who are viſibly reclaimed from a notorious wicked courſe, in theſe we likewiſe frequently ſee this change *gradually* made, by ſtrong impreſſions made upon their minds, moſt frequently by the word of God; ſometimes by his providence, whereby by they are convinc'd of the evil and danger of their courſe, and awakened to conſideration, and melted into ſorrow and repentance; and perhaps exercis'd with great terrors of conſcience, till at length by the grace of God, they come to a fixt purpoſe and reſolution of forſaking their ſins, and turning to God; and after many ſtrugglings and conflicts with their luſts, and the ſtrong bias of evil habits, this reſolution, aſſiſted by the grace of God, doth effectually prevail, and make a real change both in the temper of their minds, and the courſe of their lives; and when this is done, and not before, they are ſaid to be *regenerate.* But all the while this was a doing, the *new man* was forming, and the work of regeneration was going on; and it was perhaps a very conſiderable time from the firſt beginning of it, till it came to a fixt and ſettled ſtate. And this I doubt not in experience of moſt perſons who are reclaimed from a vicious courſe of life, is found to be the uſual and ordinary method of God's grace in their converſion. And if ſo, it is in vain to pretend that a thing is done *in an inſtant*, which by ſo manifold experience is found to take up a great deal of time, and to be effected *by degrees.*

And whereas ſome men are pleaſed to call all this the *preparatory* work to regeneration, but not the regeneration itſelf, this is an idle contention about words. For if theſe preparations be a degree of goodneſs, and a gradual tendency towards it, then the work is begun by them, and during the continuance of them, is all the while a doing; and though it be hard to fix the point or inſtant when a man juſt arrives at this ſtate, and not before, yet it is very ſenſible when a man is in it, and this change when it is really made, will ſoon diſcover itſelf by plain and ſenſible effects.

Fourthly and laſtly, All this is very agreeable to the plain and conſtant tenor of ſcripture, *Iſa.* i. 16. where the Prophet exhorts to this change, he ſpeaks of it as a *gradual* thing, *Waſh ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well*; that is, break off evil and vicious habits, and gain the contrary habits of virtue and goodneſs by the exerciſe of it. The ſcripture ſpeaks of ſome, as farther from a ſtate of grace than others, *Jer.* xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil*; plainly declaring the great difficulty, equal almoſt to a natural impoſſibility, of reclaiming thoſe to goodneſs, who have been long habituated to an evil courſe. And the ſcripture ſpeaks of ſome as nearer to a ſtate of grace than others. Our Saviour tells the young man in the goſpel, who ſaid *he had kept the commands of God from his youth*; that *he was not far from the kingdom of God.* But now, if by an *irreſiſtible* act of God's power, this change be made *in an inſtaut*; and cannot otherwiſe be made, how is one man nearer to a ſtate of grace, or farther from it than another? If all that are made good, muſt be made ſo *in an inſtant* or not at all, then no man is nearer being made good than another; for if he were nearer to it, he might ſooner be made ſo; but that cannot be, if all muſt be made good *in an inſtant*; for ſooner than *that* no man can be made ſo. If the ſimilitude of our *being dead in ſins and treſpaſſes* be ſtrictly taken, no man is nearer a reſurrection to *a new life* than another; as he that died but a week ago, is as far from being raiſed to life again, as he that died a thouſand yeas ago; the reſurrection of both requires an *Omnipotent* act, and to that both are equally eaſy.

The two Parables of our Saviour, *Matth.* xiii. 31, 33. are by many interpreters underſtood of the *gradual* operation of grace upon the hearts of men. *That* wherein *the kingdom of heaven is liken'd to a grain of muſtard-ſeed, which being ſown was the leaſt of all ſeeds*, but by degrees *grew up to be the greateſt of herbs*; and *to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three meaſures of meal, till the whole was leavened:* intimating the progreſs of God's grace, which *by degrees* diffuſeth itſelf over the whole temper of a man's mind, into all the actions of his life. To be ſure the parable of *the ſeed which fell upon good gronnd*, does repreſent the efficacy of the word of God, accompanied by his grace upon the minds of men, and *that* is ſaid *to ſpring up, and increaſe, and to bring forth fruit with patience*; which ſurely does expreſs to us the *gradual* operation of God's word and grace in the renovation and change of a man's heart and life.

The New Teſtament indeed ſpeaks of the ſudden change of many upon the firſt preaching of the Goſpel, which I have told you before is not a ſtandard of the ordinary method of God's grace; the not conſidering of which, hath been a great cauſe of all the miſtakes in this matter. 'Tis true, thoſe which were thus converted to the belief of the Goſpel, their faith was *a virtual principle* of all grace and virtue, though not *formally* *the habit* of every particular grace. St. *Paul* himſelf, who was a prime inſtance of this kind, ſpeaks as if he acquir'd the grace of contentment by great conſideration, and diligent care of himſelf in ſeveral conditions; not as if the habit of this grace had been infuſed into him at once, *Phil.* iv. 11, 12. *I have learn'd in whatſoever ſtate I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abaſed, and I know how to abound; every where and in all things I am inſtructed, both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound, and to ſuffer need.* And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing I propounded to conſider, namely, the true and juſt importance of this metaphor of *the new creation.* The *two* particulars which remain, I ſhall, by God's aſſiſtance, finiſh in my next diſcourſe.

The Fifth Sermon on this Text.

SERMON LVI.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Neceſſity, in order to Juſtification and Salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion; but a new Creature.

THE *obſervation* I am ſtill upon from theſe words is this, *viz.* That in the chriſtian religion nothing will avail to our juſtification, but the renovation of our hearts and lives, expreſt here by a *new creature.* In treating of which, I propos'd the doing of *three* things.

Firſt, To ſhew the true import of this metaphor of *a new creature.*

Secondly, To ſhew that this is the great condition of our juſtification; And,

Thirdly, That it is highly reaſonable that it ſhould be ſo.

In treating of the *firſt* of theſe particulars, I have conſider'd ſome doctrines as founded upon this metaphor, which I have ſhewn at large not only to have no foundation in ſcripture, or reaſon, or experience; but alſo to be very unreaſonable in themſelves, and contrary to the plain and conſtant tenor of ſcripture, and to the ordinary method of God's grace in the regeneration of men, whether by a religious and virtuous education, or in thoſe who are reclaim'd from a notorious wicked courſe of life. And that I have ſo long inſiſted upon this argument, and handled it in a more contentious way than is uſual with me, did not proceed from any love to controverſy, which I am leſs fond of every day than other; but from a great deſire to put an end to theſe controverſies, and quarrelings in the dark, by bringing them to a clear ſtate and plain iſſue, and likewiſe to undeceive good men concerning ſome current notions and doctrines, which I do really believe to be diſhonourable to God, and contrary to the plain declarations of ſcripture, and a cauſe of great perplexity and diſcomfort to the minds of men, and a real diſcouragement to the reſolutions and endeavours of becoming better. Upon which conſiderations I was ſtrongly urgent to ſearch theſe doctrines to the bottom, and to contribute what in me lay, to the reſcuing of good men from the diſquiet and intanglement of them.

I will conclude this matter with a few cautions, not unworthy to be remember'd by us; That we would be careful ſo to aſcribe all *good* to God, that we be ſure we aſcribe nothing to him that is *evil*, or any ways unworthy of him; That we do not make him the ſole author of our ſalvation, in ſuch a way, as will unavoidably charge upon him the final impenitency and ruin of a great part of mankind; That we do not ſo magnify the grace of God, as to make his precepts and exhortations ſignify nothing; ſuch as theſe, *Make ye new hearts, and new ſpirits, ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate*; where, if by *the ſtrait gate* be meant the difficulty of our *firſt entrance* upon a religious courſe, that is of our converſion and regeneration, I cannot imagine how it is poſſible to reconcile our being *meerly paſſive* in this work, and doing *nothing at all* in it, with our Saviour's precept of *ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate*; unleſs to be *very active*, and to be *meerly paſſive* about the ſame thing be all one, and an *earneſt contention and endeavour* be the ſame thing with *doing nothing*. Again, That we do not make the utmoſt degeneracy and depravation which men ever arrived at by the greateſt abuſe of themſelves, and the moſt vile and wicked practices, the ſtandard of an unregenerate ſtate, and of the common condition of all men by nature. And laſtly, That we do not make ſome particular inſtances in ſcripture, of the ſtrange and ſudden converſion of ſome perſons, (as namely, of St. *Paul* and the Jailor, in the *Acts*) the common rule and meaſure of every man's converſion; ſo that unleſs a man be as it were ſtruck down by a light and power from heaven, and taken with a fit of trembling, and frighted almoſt out of his wits, or find in himſelf ſomething equal to this, he can have no aſſurance of his converſion; whereas a much ſurer judgment may be made of the ſincerity of a man's converſion, by the real effects of this change, than by the manner of it. This our Saviour hath taught us, by that apt reſemblance of *the operation of God's Spirit* to *the blowing of the wind*, of the original cauſe whereof, and of the reaſon of its ceaſing or continuance, and why it blows ſtronger or gentler, this way or that way, we are altogether ignorant; but *that it is*, we are ſenſible from the ſound of it, *John* iii. 8. *The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound of it, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* The effects of God's holy Spirit in the regeneration of men are ſenſible, tho' the manner and degrees of his operation upon the ſouls of men are ſo various, that we can give no account of them; by which, one wou'd think our Saviour had ſufficiently caution'd us, not to reduce the operations of God's grace and holy Spirit in the regeneration of men, to any certain rule or ſtandard, but chiefly to regard the ſenſible effects of this ſecret work upon the hearts and lives of men.

And after all, it is in vain to contend by any arguments againſt clear and certain experience. If we plainly ſee that many are *inſenſibly* changed, and made good by pious education *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*; and that ſome who have long lived in a prophane neglect and contempt of religion, are by the ſecret power of God's word and holy Spirit, upon calm conſideration, without any great terrors and amazements, viſibly changed and brought to a better mind and courſe; it is in vain in theſe caſes to pretend that this change is not real, becauſe the manner of it is not anſwerable to ſome inſtances which are recorded in ſcripture, or which we have obſerv'd in our experience; and becauſe theſe perſons cannot give ſuch an account of the time and manner of their converſion, as is agreeable to theſe inſtances; which is juſt as if I ſhould meet a man beyond ſea, whom I had known in *England*, and would not believe that he had croſt the Seas, becauſe he ſaid he had a ſmooth and eaſy paſſage, and was wafted over by a gentle wind, and could tell no ſtories of ſtorms and tempeſts.

And thus I have fully and faithfully endeavour'd to open to you the juſt importance of this phraſe or expreſſion in the text, of *the new creature*, or *the new creation*. I proceed to the

Second particular I propounded, namely, that the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is according to the terms of the Goſpel, and the chriſtian religion, the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that this is the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance with thoſe phraſes in the parallel texts to this, of *faith perfected by charity*, and of *keeping the commandments of God*.

That according to the terms of the Goſpel, the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, is the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is plain, not only from this text, which affirms, that in the chriſtian religion nothing will avail us but *the new creature*; but likewiſe from many other clear texts of ſcripture; and this, whether by juſtification be meant our firſt juſtification upon our faith and repentance, or our continuance in this ſtate, or our final juſtification by our ſolemn acquittal and abſolution at the great day, which in ſcripture is called *ſalvation*, and *eternal life*.

That this is the condition of our firſt juſtification, that is, of the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and our being received into the grace and favour of God, is plain from all thoſe texts, where this change is expreſt by our *repentance* and *converſion*, by our *regeneration* and *renovation*, by our *purification* and *ſanctification*, or by any other terms of the like importance. For under every one of theſe notions, this change is made the condition of the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and acceptance to the favour of God.

Under the notion of *repentance and converſion*, Acts ii. 38. *Repent and be baptiſed every one of you in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, for the remiſſion of ſins.* Acts iii. 19. *Repent and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out.* Upon the ſame account, the penitent acknowledgment of our ſins, which is an aſſential part of repentance, is made a condition of the forgiveneſs of them, 1 *John* i. 9. *If we confeſs our ſins, he is faithful and juſt to forgive us our ſins, and to cleanſe us from all unrighteouſneſs.* Under the notion of *regeneration* and *renovation*, 2 Cor. v. 17. *If any man be in Chriſt,* that is, become a true Chriſtian, which is all one with being in a juſtified ſtate, *he is a new creature; old things are paſt away, behold all things are become new.* Tit. iii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. where the Apoſtle declares at large, what change is requir'd to put us into a juſtified ſtate, and to entitle us to the inheritance of eternal life; *for we ourſelves were alſo ſometimes fooliſh, diſobedient, deceived, ſerving divers luſts and pleaſures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindneſs and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteouſneſs which we have done,* that is, not for any precedent righteouſneſs of ours, for we were great ſinners, *but according to his mercy he ſaved us, by the waſhing of regeneration, and the renewing of the holy Ghoſt, which he ſhed on us abundantly through Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour, that being juſtified by his grace, we ſhould be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* So that the change of our former temper, and converſion and regeneration, and *the renewing of the holy Ghoſt*, is antecedently neceſſary to our juſtification, that is, to the pardon of our ſins, and our reſtitution to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life. So likewiſe under the notion of *purification and ſanctification*, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. where the Apoſtle enumerates ſeveral ſins and vices, which will certainly exclude men from the favour and kingdom of God, from which we muſt be cleanſed, before we can be juſtified or ſaved; *know ye not that the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. And ſuch were ſome of you: but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified, in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the Spirit of our God.* 2 *Cor.* vi. 17, 18. where the Apoſtle likewiſe makes our *purification* a condition of our being received into the favour of God, and reckon'd into the number of his children; *touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye ſhall be my ſons and daughters, ſaith the Lord Almighty.* And that by *not touching the unclean thing*, is here certainly meant our ſanctification and purification from ſin, is evident from what immediately follows in the beginning of the next chapter; *having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved! let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*; that is, having this encouragement, that upon this condition we ſhall be received to the favour of God, let us purify ourſelves, that we may be capable of this great bleſſing.

And our continuance in this ſtate of grace and favour with God, depends upon our perſeverance in holineſs; for *if any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him.*

And laſtly, this is alſo the condition of our final juſtification, and abſolution by the ſentence of the great day, *Matt.* v. 8. *Bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall ſee God.* John iii. 3. *Except a man be born again he cannot ſee the kingdom of God.* Heb. xii. 14. *Follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* 1 John iii. 3. the Apoſtle there ſpeaking of the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God, tells us what we muſt do, if ever we hope to be partakers of it; *every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure.*

And this condition here mention'd in the text, of our being *new creatures*, is the ſame in ſenſe and ſubſtance with thoſe expreſſions which we find in the two parallel texts to this, where *faith which is perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*, are made the condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God. *Gal.* v. 6. *In Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but faith, which is conſummate* or *made perfect by charity*; and 1 *Cor.* vii. 19. *Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* It is evident that the deſign and meaning of theſe three texts is the ſame, and therefore theſe three expreſſions of *the new creature*, and of *faith perfected by charity*, and of *keeping the commandments of God*, do certainly ſignify the ſame thing. That *the new creature* ſignifies the change of our ſtate, from a ſtate of diſobedience and ſin, to a ſtate of obedience and holineſs of life, I have ſhewn at large; and the Apoſtle explaining this *new creation*, moſt expreſly tells us, *Epheſ.* ii. 10. *We are his workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we ſhould walk in them*; and *Coloſſ.* iii. 10, 12, 13, 14. where the Apoſtle tells them, that they ought to give teſtimony of their renovation, and having put on *the new man*, by all the fruits of obedience and goodneſs; *ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; and above all theſe things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection.* And the Apoſtle St. *Peter* tells us, that our regeneration, which he calls *ſanctification of the Spirit, is unto obedience*, 1 *Pet.* i. 2. So that our renovation conſiſteth in the principle and practice of obedience, and a good life; and what is this but *faith perfected by charity?* And *charity* the Apoſtle tells us *is the fulfilling of the law*; and what is *the fulfilling of the law*, but *keeping the commandments of God?* And *keeping the commandments of God*, or at leaſt a ſincere reſolution of obedience, when there is not time and opportunity for the trial of it, is in ſcripture as expreſly made a condition both of our preſent and final juſtification and acceptance with God, as *faith* is, and in truth is the ſame with a *living and operative faith*, and *a faith that is conſummate*, and *made perfect by charity. Acts* x. 34, 35. *Of a truth, I perceive* (ſaith St. *Peter) that God is no reſpecter of perſons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him*; which ſpeech does as plainly, as words can do any thing, declare to us upon what terms all mankind, of what condition or nation ſoever, may find acceptance with God. *Rom.* ii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. *Who will render to every man according to his deeds, to them who by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but to them who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs; indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil; of the Jew firſt, and alſo of the Gentile: but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the Gentile.* As to our acceptance with God, and the rewards of another world, it matters not whether *Jew* or *Gentile, circumciſed or uncircumciſed*,; that which maketh the difference, is *obeying the truth*, or *obeying unrighteouſneſs*; *working good*, or *doing evil*; theſe are the things which will avail to our juſtification, or condemnation at the great day. To the ſame purpoſe is that ſaying of the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews*, chap. v. 9. that *Chriſt is the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

I will conclude this matter with two remarkable ſayings, the one towards the beginning, the other towards the end of the Bible, to ſatisfy us that this is the tenor of the holy Scriptures, and the conſtant doctrine of it from the beginning to the end. *Gen.* iv. 7. It is God's ſpeech to *Cain*, *If thou doſt well, ſhalt thou not be accepted?* And *Rev.* xxii. 14. *Bleſſed are they, that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

And thus I have done with the *ſecond* thing I propounded, which was to ſhew, that according to the terms of the Goſpel, and the chriſtian religion, the real renovation of our hearts and lives is the great condition of our juſtification and acceptance with God, and that this in ſenſe and ſubſtance is the ſame with *faith made perfect by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God.*

The *third* and laſt particular remains to be ſpoken to, namely, That it is highly reaſonable that this ſhould be the condition of our juſtification, and acceptance to the favour of God; and that upon theſe *two* accounts.

Firſt, For the honour of God's holineſs.

Secondly, In order to the qualifying of us for the favour of God, and the enjoyment of him, for the pardon of our ſins, and the reward of eternal life.

Firſt, For the honour of God's holineſs. For ſhould God have received men to his favour, and rewarded them with eternal glory and happineſs, for the meer belief of the Goſpel, or a confident perſuaſion that Chriſt would ſave them without any change of their hearts and lives, without *repentance from dead works*, and *fruits meet for repentance*, and *amendment of life*; he had not given ſufficient teſtimony to the world of his love to holineſs and righteouſneſs, and of his hatred of ſin and iniquity. The Apoſtle tells us, that God in the juſtification of a ſinner *declares his righteouſneſs*; but ſhould he juſtify men upon other terms, this would not *declare his righteouſneſs* and love of holineſs, but rather an indifferency, whether men were good and righteous or not. For a bare aſſent to the truth of the Goſpel, without the fruits of holineſs and obedience, is not *a living*, but *a dead faith*, and ſo far from being acceptable to God, that it is an affront to him; and a confident reliance upon Chriſt for ſalvation, while we continue in our ſins, is not a juſtifying faith, but a bold and impudent preſumption upon the mercy of God, and the merits of our Saviour; who indeed *juſtifies the ungodly*, that is, thoſe that *have been* ſo, but not thoſe that *continue ſo*. And if God ſhould pardon ſinners, and reward them with eternal life, upon any other terms than upon our becoming *new creatures*, than upon ſuch *a faith* as is *made perfect by charity*, that is, by *keeping the commands of God*; this would be ſo far from *declaring his righteouſneſs*, and being a teſtimony of his hatred and diſpleaſure againſt ſin, that it would give the greateſt countenance and encouragement to it imaginable.

Secondly, It is likewiſe very reaſonable, that ſuch a faith, that makes us *new creatures*, and is *perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*, ſhould be the condition of juſtification, in order to the qualifying of us for the pardon of our ſins, and the reward of eternal life; that is, for the favour of God, and for the enjoyment of him. To forgive men upon other terms, were to give countenance and encouragement to perpetual rebellion, and diſobedience. That man is not fit to be forgiven, who is ſo far from being ſorry for his fault, that he goes on to offend; he is utterly incapable of mercy, who is not ſenſible that he hath done amiſs, and reſolved to amend. No Prince ever thought a rebellious ſubject capable of pardon upon lower terms than theſe. It is in the nature of the thing unfit that an obſtinate offender ſhould have any mercy or favour ſhewn to him.

And as without repentance and reſolution of better obedience, we are unfit for forgiveneſs, ſo much more for a reward; as we cannot expect God's favour, ſo we are incapable of the enjoyment of him without holineſs. Holineſs is the image of God, and makes us like to him; and till we be *like him*, we can't *ſee him*, we can have no enjoyment of him. All delightful communion and agreeable ſociety is founded in a ſimilitude of diſpoſition and manners, and therefore ſo long as we are unlike to God in the temper and diſpoſition of our minds, and in the actions and courſe of our lives, neither can God take pleaſure in us, nor we in him, but there will be a perpetual jarring and diſcord between him and us; and tho' we were in heaven, and ſeated in the place of the bleſſed, yet we ſhould not, nay we could not be happy; becauſe we ſhould want the neceſſary materials and ingredients of happineſs. For it is with the ſoul in this reſpect, as it is with the body; tho' all things be eaſy without us, and no cruelty be exercis'd upon us, to give torment and vexation to us, yet if we be inwardly diſeaſed, we may have pain and anguiſh enough, we may be as it were upon the rack, and feel as great torment from the inward diſorder of our humours, as if we were tortur'd from without. So it is with the ſoul; ſin and vice are internal diſeaſes, which do naturally create trouble and diſcontent, and nothing but diverſion, and the variety of objects and pleaſures which entertain men in this world, hinders a wicked man from being out of his wits, whenever he reflects upon himſelf; for all the irregular appetites and paſſions, luſt, and malice, and revenge, are ſo many *furies* within us; and tho' there were no Devil to torment us, yet the diſorder of our own minds, and the horrors of a guilty conſcience would be a hell to us, and make us extremely miſerable in the very regions of happineſs. So that it is neceſſary that our *faith* ſhould be *made perfect by charity*, and that we ſhould become *new creatures*; not only from the arbitrary conſtitution and appointment of God, but from the nature and reaſon of the thing; becauſe nothing but this can diſpoſe us for that bleſſedneſs, which God hath promiſed to us, and prepared for us. Faith conſidered abſtractedly from the fruits of holineſs and obedience, of goodneſs and charity, will bring no man into the favour of God. All the excellency of faith is, that it is the principle of a good life, and furniſheth us with the beſt motives and arguments thereto, the promiſes and threatnings of the Goſpel; and therefore in heaven, when we come to *ſight* and *enjoyment*, *faith* and *hope* ſhall ceaſe, but *charity never faileth*; for if it ſhould, heaven would ceaſe to be heaven to us, becauſe it is the very frame and temper of happineſs; and if this diſpoſition be not wrought in us in this world, we ſhall be altogether incapable of the felicity of the other.

You ſee then what it is that muſt recommend us to the favour of God; the real renovation of our heatrs and lives, after the image of him that created us. This muſt be repaired in us, before ever we can hope to be reſtored to the grace and favour of God, or to be capable of the reward of eternal life. And what could God have done more reaſonable, than to make theſe very things the terms of our ſalvation, which are the neceſſary cauſes and means of it? How could he have dealt more mercifully and kindly with us, than to appoint *that* to be the condition of our happineſs, which is the only qualification that can make us capable of it?

I will conclude all with that excellent paſſage in the wiſdom of *Solomon*, Chap. vi. 17, 18. *The very true beginning of wiſdom is the deſire of diſcipline, and the care of diſcipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws, and taking heed to her laws is the aſſurance of incorruption.* The ſum of what I have ſaid upon this argument amounts to this, that upon the terms of the Goſpel we can have no hope of the forgiveneſs of our Sins and eternal Salvation, unleſs our nature be renewed, and the image of God, which is defaced by ſin, be repaired in us, and we be *created in Chriſt unto good works*; That no faith will avail to our juſtification and acceptance with God, but that which is *made perfect by charity*, that is, by *fulfilling of the law*, and *keeping the commandments of God*: by ſincere obedience and holineſs of life, which notwithſtanding the unavoidable imperfection of it in this ſtate, will nevertheleſs be accepted with God, through the merits of our bleſſed Saviour, *who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood. To whom be glory for ever.* Amen.

SERMON LVII.

The firſt Sermon on this Text.

The Danger of all known Sin, both from the Light of Nature and Revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them.

IN the beginning of this Chapter, the Apoſtle declares that he was particularly deſigned and appointed by God to preach the Goſpel to the world, and that he was not aſhamed of his miniſtry, notwithſtanding all the reproach and perſecution it was attended withal, and notwithſtanding the ſlight and undervaluing opinion which the world had of the doctrine which he preached, it being *to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*; for tho' this might reflect ſome diſparagement upon it in the eſteem of ſenſual and carnal men, yet to thoſe who weighed things impartially, and conſider'd the excellent end and deſign of the chriſtian doctrine, and the force and efficacy of it to that end; it will appear to be an inſtrument admirably fitted by the wiſdom of God, for the reformation and ſalvation of mankind.

And therefore he tells us, *verſe* 16. that how much ſoever it was deſpiſed by that ignorant and inconſiderate age, *he was not aſhamed of the Goſpel of Chriſt*; *becauſe it is the power of God unto ſalvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the Greek*; that is, the doctrine of the Goſpel ſincerely believed and embraced, is a moſt proper and powerful means, deſigned by God for the ſalvation of mankind; not only of the Jews, but alſo of the Gentiles.

The revelations which God had formerly made, were chiefly reſtrained to the Jewiſh nation; but this great and laſt revelation of the Goſpel, was equally calculated for the benefit and advantage of all mankind. The Goſpel indeed was firſt preached to the Jews, and from thence publiſh'd to the whole world; and as this doctrine was deſign'd for the general benefit of mankind, ſo it was very likely to be effectual to that end, being an inſtrument equally fitted for the ſalvation of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews; *it is the power of God to ſalvation to every one that believes, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the Greek.*

And to ſhew the efficacy of it, he inſtanceth in *two* things, which render it ſo powerful and effectual a means for the ſalvation of mankind.

Firſt, Becauſe therein the grace and mercy of God, in the juſtification of a ſinner, and declaring him righteous, is ſo clearly revealed, *ver.* 17. *For therein is the righteouſneſs of God revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written, the juſt ſhall live by faith.* This is very obſcurely expreſt, but the meaning of this text will be very much cleared, by comparing it with another in the iii*d Chapter* of this epiſtle, *ver.* 20, 21, 22, *&c.* where the Apoſtle ſpeaks more fully and expreſly of the way of our juſtification by the faith of Jeſus Chriſt, that is, by the belief of the Goſpel. He aſſerts at the 20*th* verſe, that *by the deeds of the law there ſhall no fleſh be juſtified in the ſight of God.* To this way of juſtification, *by the deeds of the law*, he oppoſeth *the righteouſneſs of God by the faith of Jeſus Chriſt, to all, and upon all them that believe*, which is the Goſpel way of juſtification, ver. 21, 22. *But now the righteouſneſs of God without the law is manifeſted, being witneſſed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteouſneſs of God, which is by the faith of Jeſus Chriſt, unto all, and upon all them that believe. The righteouſneſs of God without the law is manifeſted:* that is, the way which God hath taken to juſtify ſinners, and declare them righteous *without the deeds of the law*, that is, without obſerving the law of *Moſes*, *is manifeſted*, that is, is clearly revealed in the Goſpel, (which is the ſame with what the Apoſtle had ſaid before, that *the righteouſnſes of God is revealed in the Goſpel) being witneſſed by the Law and the Prophets*, that is, the righteouſneſs of God, or the juſtification of ſinners by Jeſus Chriſt, is clearly revealed in the Goſpel, being alſo in a more obſcure manner atteſted or foretold in the old Teſtament, which he calls *the Law and the Prophets*; and this fully explains that difficult phraſe of *the righteouſneſs of God being revealed by the Goſpel from faith to faith*; that is, by a gradual revelation, being more obſcurely foretold in the old Teſtament, and clearly diſcovered in the new; ſo that theſe two paſſages are equivalent; *In the Goſpel, the righteouſneſs of God is revealed from faith to faith*; and *the righteouſneſs of God without the works of the law is manifeſted, being witneſſed by the Law and the Prophets.* There is the firſt and more imperfect revelation of it, but the clear revelation of it is *in the Goſpel*; this the Apoſtle calls *a revelation from faith to faith*; that is, from a more imperfect and obſcure, to a more expreſs and clear diſcovery and belief of it. And then the citation which follows is very pertinent, *as it is written, The juſt ſhall live by faith*; for this citation out of the old Teſtament plainly ſhews, that the way of juſtification by faith was there mentioned; or as our Apoſtle expreſſeth it, *was witneſſed by the Law and the Prophets*; and conſequently that this was a gradual diſcovery, which he calls *a revelation from faith to faith. The juſt ſhall live by faith*, that is, good men ſhall be ſaved by their faith, ſhall be juſtified and eſteemed righteous in the ſight of God, and finally ſaved by their faith. And ſo the Apoſtle in the v*th Chapter* of this epiſtle, *ver.* 18. calls our juſtification by the faith of the Goſpel, *the juſtification of life*, in oppoſition to *condemnation* and *death*, which very well explains that ſaying of the Prophet, *the juſt ſhall live by faith.* I have been the longer upon this, that I might give ſome light to a very difficult and obſcure text.

Secondly, The other inſtance whereby the Apoſtle proves the Goſpel to be ſo powerful a means for the recovery and ſalvation of men is, that therein alſo the ſeverity of God againſt impenitent ſinners, as well as his grace and mercy in the juſtification of the penitent, is clearly revealed, *ver.* 18. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſted in them, for God hath ſhewn it unto them.* The firſt, *viz.* the grace of God in our juſtification and the remiſſion of ſins paſt, is a moſt proper and powerful argument to encourage us to obedience for the future; nothing being more likely to reclaim men to their duty, than the aſſurance of indemnity for paſt crimes; and the other is one of the moſt effectual conſiderations in the world to deter men from ſin, *that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men*, &c.

From which words I ſhall obſerve theſe *ſix* things.

Firſt, The infinite danger that a wicked and ſinful courſe doth plainly expoſe men to. *The wrath of God* is here ſaid to be *revealed againſt the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of men.*

Secondly, The clear and undoubted revelation which the Goſpel hath made of this danger. *The wrath of God* againſt the ſins of men, is ſaid to be *revealed from heaven.*

Thirdly, That every wicked and vicious practice doth expoſe men to this great danger. *The wrath of God is* ſaid to be *revealed againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men.*

Fourthly, That it is a very great aggravation of ſin, for men to offend againſt the light of their own minds. The Apoſtle here aggravates the impiety and wickedneſs of the heathen world, that they did not live up to the knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, which he calls *holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs.*

Fifthly, The natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live wickedly, is a clear evidence of their *holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs.* The Apoſtle therefore chargeth them *with holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs*, becauſe *that which may be known of God, is manifeſted in them, God having ſhewed it to them.*

Sixthly and laſtly, That the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the Goſpel, againſt the impiety and wickedneſs of men, renders it a very powerful and likely means for the recovery and ſalvation of men. For the Apoſtle proves *the Goſpel of Chriſt* to be *the power of God to ſalvation*, becauſe *therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs*; that is, againſt all impenitent ſinners.

I ſhall at the preſent, by God's aſſiſtance, ſpeak to the *three* firſt of theſe particulars.

Firſt, The infinite danger that a wicked and ſinful courſe doth plainly expoſe men to. If there be a God that made the world, and governs it, and takes care of mankind, and hath given them laws and rules to live by, he cannot but be greatly diſpleaſed at the violation and tranſgreſſion of them; and certainly the diſpleaſure of God is the moſt dreadful thing in the world, and the effects of it the moſt inſupportable. The greateſt fear is from the greateſt danger, and the greateſt danger is from the greateſt power offended and enraged: and this is a conſideration exceeding full of terror, that by a ſinful courſe we expoſe ourſelves to the utmoſt diſpleaſure of the great and terrible God; for *who knows the power of his wrath? and who may ſtand before him when once he is angry? According to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath* (ſaith the Pſalmiſt.) There is no paſſion in the mind of man that is more boundleſs and infinite than our *fear*, it is apt to make wild and frightful repreſentations of evils, and to imagine them many times greater than really they are; but in this caſe our imagination muſt fall ſhort of the truth and terror of the thing; for the wrath of God doth far exceed the utmoſt jealouſy and ſuſpicion of the moſt fearful and guilty conſcience; and the greateſt ſinner under his greateſt anguiſh and deſpair, cannot apprehend or fear it more than there is reaſon for; *according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath.*

If it were only the wrath and diſpleaſure of *men* that the ſinner were expoſed to, there might be reaſon enough for fear, becauſe *they* have many times power enough to cruſh an offender, and cruelty enough to fret every vein of his body, and to torment him in every part: but the wrath and vengeance of *men* bears no compariſon with the wrath of *God*. Their paſſions are many times ſtrong and bluſtering; but their arm is but ſhort, and their power ſmall, *they have not an arm like God, nor can they thunder with a voice like him.* They may deſign conſiderable harm and miſchief to us; but it is not always in the power of their hand to wreak their malice upon us, and to execute all the miſchief which their inraged minds may prompt them to; the very utmoſt they can deſign, is to torment our bodies, and to take away our lives, and when they have deſigned this, they may *die* firſt, *and return to their duſt, and then their thoughts periſh with them*, and all their malicious deſigns are at an end; they are always under the power and government of a ſuperior being, and can go no farther than he gives them leave. However if they do their worſt, and ſhoot all their arrows at us, we cannot ſtand at the mark long, their wrath will ſoon make an end of us, and ſet us free from all their cruelty and oppreſſion; *they can but kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do*; their moſt refined malice cannot reach our *ſpirits*, no weapon that can be formed by the utmoſt art of man can pierce and wound our *ſouls*; they can drive us out of *this* world, but they cannot purſue us into the *other*; ſo that at the worſt the grave will be a ſanctuary to us, and death a ſafe retreat from all their rage and fury.

But the wrath of God is not confined by any of theſe limits. *Once hath God ſpoken* (ſaith *David* by an elegant Hebrew phraſe to expreſs the certainty of the thing) *once hath God ſpoken, and twice I have heard this, that power belongs to God,* Pſal. lxii. 11. *He hath a mighty arm,* and when he pleaſeth to ſtretch it out, none may ſtay it, nor *ſay unto him, what doſt thou*; he hath power enough to make good all his threatenings, whatever he ſays he is able to effect, and whatever he *purpoſeth* he can *bring to paſs*; for *his counſel ſhall ſtand, and he will accompliſh all his pleaſure*; he need but ſpeak the word, and it is done; for we can neither reſiſt his power, nor fly from it; if we fly to the utmoſt parts of the earth, his hand can reach us, for *in his hands are all the corners of the earth*; if we take refuge in the grave (and we cannot do that without his leave) thither his wrath can follow us; and there it will overtake us; for his power is not confined to *this* world, nor limited to our *bodies*; *after he hath kill'd, he can deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell.*

And this is that *wrath of God which is revealed from heaven,* and which the Apoſtle chiefly intends, *viz.* the miſery and puniſhment of another world, this God hath threaten'd ſinners withal; to expreſs which to us, as fully as words can do, he heaps up in the next chapter ſo many weighty and terrible words, *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil*; in oppoſition to that great and glorious reward of *immortality and eternal life,* which is promiſed to *a patient continuance in well doing.*

So that *the wrath of God* which is here denounced *againſt the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of men,* comprehends all the evils and miſeries of this and the other world, which every ſinner is in danger of whilſt he continues impenitent; for as according to the tenour of the Goſpel, *godlineſs hath the promiſes of this life, and of that which is to come,* ſo impotency in ſin expoſeth men to the evils of both worlds, to the judgments of *the life that now is,* and to the endleſs and intolerable torments of *that which is to come.* And what can be more dreadful than the diſpleaſure of an Almighty and Eternal Being? who can puniſh to the utmoſt, and *who lives for ever,* to execute his wrath and vengeance upon ſinners; ſo that well might the Apoſtle ſay, *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Conſider this all ye that forget God, that neglect him, and live in continual diſobedience to his holy and righteous laws; much more thoſe who deſpiſe and affront him, and live in a perpetual defiance of him. *Will ye provoke the Lord to jealouſy? are ye ſtronger than he?* Think of it ſeriouſly, and forget him if you can, deſpiſe him if you dare; conſider this, leſt he take you into conſideration, and rouſe like a Lion out of ſleep, and *tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.* This is the *firſt* obſervation, the infinite danger that a wicked and ſinful courſe doth expoſe men to, *the wrath of God,* which doth not only ſignify more than all the evils that we know, but than all thoſe which the wildeſt fears and ſuſpicions of our minds can imagine.

Secondly, The next thing obſervable, is the clear and undoubted revelation which the Goſpel hath made of this danger, *the wrath of God is revealed,* &c. By which the Apoſtle intimates to us, that this was but obſcurely known to the world before, at leaſt in compariſon of that clear diſcovery which the Goſpel hath now made of it; ſo that I may allude to that expreſſion in *Job,* which he applies to death and the grave, that *hell is naked before us, and deſtruction hath no covering.*

Not but that mankind had always apprehenſions and jealouſies of the danger of a wicked life, and ſinners were always afraid of the vengeance of God purſuing their evil deeds, not only in this life, but after it too; and tho' they had turn'd the puniſhments of another world into ridiculous fables, yet the wiſer ſort of mankind could not get it out of their minds, that there was ſomething real under them; and that *Ixion*'s wheel which by a perpetual motion carried him about; and *Siſyphus* his ſtone, which he was perpetually rolling up the hill, and when he had got it near the top tumbled down, and ſtill created him a new labour; and *Tantalus* his continual hunger and thirſt, aggravated by a perpetual nearneſs of enjoyment, and a perpetual diſappointment; and *Prometheus* his being chained to a rock, with an eagle or vulture perpetually preying upon his Liver, which grew as faſt as it was gnawed; I ſay, even the wiſer among the heathens look'd upon theſe as fantaſtical repreſentations of ſomething that was real, *viz.* the grievous and endleſs puniſhment of ſinners, the not to be endured, and yet perpetually renewed torments of another world; for in the midſt of all the ignorance and degeneracy of the heathen world, mens conſciences did accuſe them when they did amiſs, and they had ſecret fears and miſgivings of ſome mighty danger hanging over them from the diſpleaſure of a ſuperior Being, and the apprehenſion of ſome great miſchiefs likely to follow their wicked actions, which ſome time or other would overtake them; which becauſe they did not always in this world, they dreaded them in the next. And this was the foundation of all thoſe ſuperſtitions, whereby the ancient Pagans endeavoured ſo carefully to appeaſe their offended deities, and to avert the calamities which they feared they would ſend down upon them. But all this while they had no certain aſſurance by any clear and expreſs revelation from God to that purpoſe, but only the jealouſies and ſuſpicions of their own minds, naturally conſequent upon thoſe notions which men generally had of God, but ſo obſcured and depraved by the luſts and vices of men, and by the groſs and falſe conceptions which they had of God, that they only ſerv'd to make them ſuperſtitious, but were not clear and ſtrong enough to make them wiſely and ſeriouſly religious. And to ſpeak the truth, the more knowing and inquiſitive part of the heathen world had brought all theſe things into great doubt and uncertainty, by the nicety and ſubtilty of diſputes about them; ſo that it was no great wonder, that theſe principles had no greater effect upon the lives of men, when their apprehenſions of them were ſo dark and doubtful.

But the Goſpel hath made a moſt clear and certain revelation of theſe things to mankind. It was written before upon mens hearts as the great ſanction of the law of nature, but the impreſſions of this were in a great meaſure blurred and worn out, ſo that it had no great power and efficacy upon the minds and manners of men; but now it is clearly diſcovered to us, *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven*, which expreſſion may well imply in it theſe *three* things:

Firſt, The clearneſs of the diſcovery; *the wrath of God* is ſaid to be *revealed*.

Secondly, The extraordinary manner of it; it is ſaid to be *revealed from heaven*.

Thirdly, The certainty of it; not being the reſult of ſubtle and doubtful reaſonings, but having a divine teſtimony and confirmation given to it, which is the proper meaning of *being revealed from heaven*.

Firſt, It imports the clearneſs of the diſcovery. The puniſhment of ſinners in another world is not ſo obſcure a matter as it was before; it is now expreſly declared in the Goſpel, together with the particular circumſtances of it, namely, that there is another life after this, wherein men ſhall receive the juſt recompence of reward for all the actions done by them in this life; that there is a particular time appointed, wherein God will call all the world to a ſolemn account, and thoſe who are in their graves ſhall by a powerful voice be raiſed to life, and thoſe who ſhall then be found alive ſhall be ſuddenly changed; *when our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, the eternal and only begotten Son of God, who once came in great humility to ſave us, ſhall come again *in power, and great glory*, attended with *his mighty Angels*; *and all nations ſhall be gathered before him*, and all mankind ſhall be ſeparated into two companies, *the righteous* and *the wicked*, who after a full hearing, and fair tryal, ſhall be ſentenced according to their actions, the one to *eternal life and happineſs*, the other to *everlaſting miſery and torment*.

So that the Goſpel hath not only declared the thing to us, that there ſhall be a future judgment; but for our farther aſſurance and ſatisfaction in this matter, and that theſe things might make a deep impreſſion, and ſtrike a great awe upon our minds, God hath been pleaſed to reveal it to us with a great many particular circumſtances, ſuch as are very worthy of God, and apt to fill the minds of men with dread and aſtoniſhment, as often as they think of them.

For the circumſtances of this judgment revealed to us in the Goſpel, are very ſolemn and awful, not ſuch as the wild fancies and imaginations of men would have been apt to have dreſt it up withal, ſuch as are the fictions of the heathen Poets, and the extravagancies of *Mahomet*; which tho' they be terrible enough, yet they are withal ridiculous; but ſuch as are every way becoming the Majeſty of the great God, and the ſolemnity of the great day, and ſuch as do not in the leaſt ſavour of the vanity and lightneſs of human imagination.

For what more fair and equal, than that men ſhould be tried by a *man* like themſelves, one of the ſame rank and condition, that had experience of the infirmities and temptations of human nature? So our Lord tells us, that *the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, becauſe he is the ſon of man*, and therefore cannot be excepted againſt, as not being a fit and equal judge. And this St. Paul offers as a clear proof of the equitable proceedings of that day; *God* (ſays he) *hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained.*

And then what more congruous than that the Son of God, who had taken ſo much pains for the ſalvation of men, and came into the world for that purpoſe, and had uſed all imaginable means for the reformation of mankind; I ſay what more congruous, than that this very perſon ſhould be honoured by God to ſit in judgment upon the world, and to condemn thoſe, who after all the means that had been tried for their recovery, would not repent and be ſaved. And what more proper, than that men, who are to be judged for *things done in the body*, ſhould be judged *in the body*, and conſequently that the reſurrection of the dead ſhould precede the general judgment?

And what more magnificent and ſuitable to this glorious ſolemnity, than the awful circumſtances which the ſcripture mentions of the appearance of this great Judge; that he ſhall *deſcend from heaven* in great majeſty and glory, attended with *his mighty Angels*, and that *every eye ſhall ſee him*; that upon his appearance, the frame of nature ſhall be in an agony, and the whole world in *flame* and *confuſion*; that thoſe great and glorious bodies of light ſhall be obſcured, and by degrees extinguiſh'd; *the ſun ſhall be darken'd, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven ſhaken*; yea, *the heavens themſelves ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, and the elements diſſolve with fervent heat; the earth alſo, and all the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up.* I appeal to any man, whether this be not a repreſentation of things very proper and ſuitable to *that great day*, wherein he who made the world ſhall come to judge it? and whether the wit of man ever deviſed any thing ſo awful, and ſo agreeable to the majeſty of God, and the ſolemn judgment of the whole world? The deſcription which *Virgil* makes of the judgment of another world, of *the Elyſian fields*, and *the infernal regions*, how infinitely do they fall ſhort of the majeſty of the holy Scripture, and the deſcription there made of *heaven* and *hell*, and of *the great and terrible day of the Lord!* ſo that in compariſon they are childiſh and trifling; and yet perhaps he had the moſt regular and moſt govern'd imagination of any man that ever lived, and obſerved the greateſt decorum in his characters and deſcriptions. But who can declare *the great things of God*, but *he to whom God ſhall reveal them!*

Secondly, This expreſſion of *the wrath of God* being *revealed from heaven*, doth not only imply the clear diſcovery of the thing, but likewiſe ſomething extraordinary in the manner of the diſcovery. It is not only a natural impreſſion upon the minds of men, that God will ſeverely puniſh ſinners; but he hath taken care that mankind ſhould be inſtructed in this matter in a very particular and extraordinary manner. He hath not left it to the reaſon of men to collect it from the conſideration of his attributes and perfections, his holineſs and juſtice, and from the conſideration of the promiſcuous adminiſtration of his providence towards good and bad men in this world; but he hath been pleaſed to ſend an extraordinary perſon from heaven, on purpoſe to declare this thing plainly to the world: *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven*; that is, God ſent *his own Son from heaven*, on purpoſe to declare *his wrath* againſt all obſtinate and impenitent ſinners, that he might effectually awaken the drowſy world to repentance; he hath ſent an extraordinary Ambaſſador into the world, to give warning to all thoſe who continue in their ſins, of the judgment of the great day, and to ſummon them before his dreadful tribunal. So the Apoſtle tells the *Athenians*, Acts xvii. 30, 31. *Now he commandeth all men every where to repent; becauſe he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.*

Thirdly, This expreſſion implies likewiſe the certainty of this diſcovery. If the wrath of God had only been declared in the diſcourſes of wiſe men, tho' grounded upon very probable reaſon, yet it might have been brought into doubt by the contrary reaſonings of ſubtle and diſputing men: But to put the matter out of all queſtion, we have a divine teſtimony for it, and God hath confirmed it from heaven, by ſigns, and wonders, and miracles, eſpecially by the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead; *for by this he hath given aſſurance unto all men, that it is he who is ordained of God to judge the quick and dead.*

Thus you ſee in what reſpect *the wrath of God* is ſaid to be *revealed from heaven*, in that the Goſpel hath made a more clear, and particular, and certain diſcovery of the judgment of the great day, than ever was made to the world before. I proceed to the

Third obſervation, which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to; namely, that every wicked and vicious practice doth expoſe men to this dreadful danger. The Apoſtle inſtanceth in the two chief heads to which the ſins of men may be reduced, *impiety* towards God, and *unrighteouſneſs* towards men; and therefore he is to be underſtood to denounce *the wrath of God* againſt every particular kind of ſin, comprehended under theſe general heads; ſo that no man that allows himſelf in any impiety and wickedneſs of life can hope to eſcape the wrath of God. Therefore it concerns us to be intirely religious, and *to have reſpect to all God's commandments*; and to take heed that we do not allow ourſelves in the practice of any kind of ſin whatſoever, becauſe the living in any one known ſin is enough to expoſe us to the dreadful wrath of God. Though a man be juſt and righteous in his dealings with men, yet if he neglect the worſhip and ſervice of God, this will certainly bring him under condemnation: and on the other hand, though a man may ſerve God never ſo diligently and devoutly, yet if he be defective in righteouſneſs towards men, if he deal falſly and fraudulently with his neighbour, he ſhall not eſcape the wrath of God; tho' a man pretend to never ſo much piety and devotion, yet if he be *unrighteous, he ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God*; if any man *over-reach and defraud his brother in any matter, the Lord is the avenger of ſuch*, ſaith St. *Paul*, 1 *Theſſ.* iv. 6.

So that here is a very powerful argument to take men off from all ſin, and to engage them to a conſtant and careful diſcharge of their whole duty toward God and men, and to reform whatever is amiſs either in the frame and temper of their minds, or in the actions and courſe of their lives; becauſe any kind of wickedneſs, any one ſort of vicious courſe, lays men open to the vengeance of God, and the puniſhments of another world; *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men*; there is no exception in the caſe, we muſt forſake all ſin, ſubdue every luſt, *be holy in all manner of converſation*, otherwiſe we can have no reaſonable hopes of eſcaping *the wrath of God*, and the damnation of hell. But I proceed to the

Fourth obſervation; namely, that it is a very great aggravation of ſin, for men to offend againſt the light of their own minds. The Apoſtle here aggravates the wickedneſs of the heathen world, that they did not live up to that knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, *holding the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs*. And that he ſpeaks here of the heathen, is plain from his following diſcourſe, and the character he gives of thoſe perſons of whom he was ſpeaking, *who hold the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs*; *becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewn it unto them*; and this he proves, becauſe thoſe who were deſtitute of divine revelation, were not without all knowledge of God, being led by the ſight of this viſible world, to the knowledge of an inviſible Being and Power that was the author of it, ver. 20. 21. *For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead, ſo that they are without excuſe*; *becauſe that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.* (*Hæc eſt ſumma delicti, nolle agnoſcere, quem ignorare non poſſis*, ſaith *Tertullian* to the heathen; "This is the height of thy fault, not to acknowledge him, whom "thou canſt not but know, not to own him, of whom thou canſt not be ignorant if "thou wouldſt;) *neither were thankful*; they did not pay thoſe acknowledgments to him which of right were due to the Author of their Being, and of all good things; *but became vain in their imaginations*; ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, *they were fool'd with their own reaſonings.* This he ſpeaks of the *Philoſophers*, who in thoſe great arguments of the *Being* and *Providence of God*, the *immortality of the Soul*, and *the rewards of another world*, had loſt the truth by too much ſubtilty about it, and had diſputed themſelves into doubt and uncertainty about thoſe things which were naturally known; for *nimium altercando veritas amittitur*; "Truth is many times loſt by too much contention and diſpute about it, and by too eager a purſuit of it, men many times out-"run it, and leave it behind; ver. 22. *and profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools.* Men never play the fools more, than by endeavouring to be over-ſubtle and wiſe; ver. 23. *and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beaſts, and creeping things*; here he ſpeaks of the ſottiſhneſs of their *idolatry*, whereby they provoked God to give them up to all manner of lewdneſs and impurity, *ver.* 24. *wherefore God alſo gave them up unto uncleanneſs, through the luſts of their own hearts*; and again, *ver.* 26. *for this cauſe God gave* *them up to vile affections*; and then he enumerates the abominable luſts and vices they were guilty of, notwithſtanding their natural acknowledgment of the divine Juſtice, ver. 32. *who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit ſuch things are worthy of death, not only do the ſame, but have pleaſure in them that do them.* By all which it appears that he ſpeaks of the Heathen, who offended againſt the natural light of their own minds, and therefore were *without excuſe*. *Quam ſibi veniam ſperare poſſunt impietatis ſuæ, qui non agnoſcunt cultum ejus, quem prorſus ignorari ab hominibus fas non eſt?* ſaith *Lactantius*, "How can they hope for pardon of their impiety, who "deny to worſhip that God, of whom it is not poſſible mankind ſhould be wholly "ignorant?

So that this is *To hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs*, injuriouſly to ſuppreſs it, and to hinder the power and efficacy of it upon our minds and actions; for ſo the word κατέχειν ſometimes ſignifies, as well as *to hold faſt*; and this every man does, who acts contrary to what he believes and knows; he offers violence to the light of his own mind, and does injury to the truth, and keeps that a priſoner, which would ſet him free; *ye ſhall know the truth* (ſays our Lord) *and the truth ſhall make you free.*

And this is one of the higheſt aggravations of the ſins of men, to offend againſt knowledge, and that light which God hath ſet up in every man's mind. If men wander and ſtumble in the dark, it is not to be wonder'd at; many times it is unavoidable, and no care can prevent it: but in the light it is expected men ſhould look before them, and diſcern their way. That natural light which the Heathens had, tho' it was but comparatively dim and imperfect, yet the Apoſtle takes notice of it as a great aggravation of their idolatrous and abominable practices. Thoſe natural notions which all men have of God, if they had in any meaſure attended to them, and govern'd themſelves by them, might have been ſufficient to have preſerved them from diſhonouring the Deity, by *worſhipping creatures inſtead of God*; the common light of nature was enough to have diſcovered to them the evil of thoſe lewd and unnatural practices, which many of them were guilty of; but they *detained* and *ſuppreſs'd the truth* moſt *injuriouſly*, and would not ſuffer it to have its natural and proper influence upon them; and this is that which left them *without excuſe*, that from the light of nature they had knowledge enough to have done better, and to have preſerved them from thoſe great crimes which were ſo common among them.

And if this was ſo great an aggravation of the impiety and wickedneſs of the heathen, and left them *without excuſe*, what apology can be made for the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of Chriſtians who have ſo ſtrong and clear a light to diſcover to them their duty, and the danger of neglecting it, to whom *the wrath of God is* plainly *revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men?* The truths of the Goſpel are ſo very clear and powerful, and ſuch an improvement of natural light, that men muſt uſe great force and violence to ſuppreſs them, and to hinder the efficacy of them upon their lives. And this is a certain rule, by how much the greater our knowledge, by ſo much the leſs is our excuſe, and ſo much the greater puniſhment is due to our faults. So our Lord hath told us, *Luke* xii. 47. *That ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* And *John* ix. 41. *If ye were blind* (ſays our Saviour to the *Jews*) *ye ſhould have no ſin.* So much ignorance as there is of our duty, ſo much abatement of the wilfulneſs of our faults; but *if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation,* ſays the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews*, Chap. x. 26, 27. *If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; implying that men cannot pretend ignorance for their faults, after ſo clear a revelation of the will of God, as is made to mankind by the Goſpel.

And upon this conſideration it is, that our Saviour doth ſo aggravate the impenitency and unbelief of the *Jews*, becauſe it was in oppoſition to all the advantages of knowledge, which can be imagined to be afforded to mankind, *John* xv. 22, 23, 24. *If I had not come and ſpoken unto them, they had not had ſin*; that is, in compariſon their ſin had been much more excuſable; *but now they have no cloak for their ſin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father alſo. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had ſin; but now have they both ſeen, and hated both me and my Father.* How is that? Our Saviour means, that they had now ſinned againſt all the advantages of knowing the will of God, that mankind could poſſibly have: at once oppoſing natural light, which was the diſpenſation of the *Father*; and the cleareſt revelation of God's will, in the diſpenſation of the Goſpel by *his Son*; *now have they both ſeen and hated both me and my Father.*

The *two* remaining obſervations I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

SERMON LVIII.

The Second Sermon on this text.

The Danger of all known Sin, both from the Light of Nature and Revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them.

I Have handled *four* of the obſervations which I rais'd from theſe words; and ſhall now proceed to the other *two* that remain.

The *Fifth* obſervation was, That the natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live contrary to it, is a ſufficient evidence of *their holding the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs.* For the reaſon why the Apoſtle chargeth them with this, is, *Becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt, in that God hath ſhewed it unto them.*

There is a natural knowledge of God, and of the duty we owe to him, which the Apoſtle calls τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, *that of God which is obvious to be known* by the light of nature, and is as much as is abſolutely neceſſary for us to know. There is ſomething of God that is incomprehenſible, and beyond the reach of our underſtandings; but his *Being* and *eſſential Perfections* may be known, which he calls his *eternal Power and Godhead*; *theſe* he tells us *are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made*; that is, the creation of the World is a plain demonſtration to men, of the *Being* and *Power* of God; and if ſo, then *God is naturally known to men*; the contrary whereof *Socinus* poſitively maintains, tho' therein he be forſaken by moſt of his followers; an opinion in my judgment, very unworthy of one, who, not without reaſon, was eſteemed ſo great a maſter of reaſon; and (tho' I believe he did not ſee it) undermining the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt foundation of all religion, which, when the natural notions of God are once taken away, will certainly want its beſt ſupport. Beſides that by denying any natural knowledge of God, and his eſſential perfections, he freely gives away one of the moſt plauſible grounds of oppoſing the doctrine of the Trinity. But becauſe this is a matter of great conſequence, and he was a great man, and is not to be confuted by contempt, but by better reaſon, if it can be found; I will conſider his reaſons for this opinion, and return a particular anſwer to them.

Firſt, He ſays that if the knowledge of God were natural, it would not be *of faith*; but the Apoſtle ſays, that *we muſt believe that he is.* The force of which argument, if it have any, lies in this, that the object of faith is divine revelation, and therefore we cannot be ſaid to *believe* what we *naturally know.* The ſchoolmen indeed ſay ſo; but the ſcripture uſeth the word *faith* more largly, for *a real perſuaſion* of any thing, whether grounded upon ſenſe, or reaſon, or divine revelation. And our Saviour's ſpeech to *Thomas*, *Becauſe thou haſt ſeen, thou haſt believed*, does ſufficiently intimate, that a man may *believe* what he *ſees*; and if ſo, what ſhould hinder, but that a man may be ſaid to *believe* what he *naturally knows*; that is, be really perſuaded that there is a God from *natural* light?

Secondly, His next argument is, becauſe the ſame Apoſtle concludes *Enoch* to have believed God, becauſe he pleaſed God, *and without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe him:* From whence he ſays it is certain that men may be without this belief, which if it be *natural* they cannot. Indeed if the Apoſtle had ſaid, that whoever believes a God, muſt of neceſſity obey and pleaſe him, then the inference had been good, that all men do not naturally believe a God, becauſe it is certain they do not pleaſe him: but it is not good the other way, no more than if a man ſhould argue thus, that becauſe whoever acts reaſonably, muſt be endowed with reaſon, therefore men are not naturally endowed with reaſon. For as men may naturally be endowed with reaſon, and yet not always make uſe of it; ſo men may naturally know and believe a God, and yet not be careful to pleaſe him.

His *third* argument is, that the Scripture ſays that there are ſome that do not believe a God, for which he cites that of *David, the fool hath ſaid in his heart there is no God*; which certainly proves, that bad men live ſo, as if they believed there were no God; nay, it may farther import, that they endeavour as much as they can, to ſtifle and extinguiſh the belief of a God in their minds, and would gladly perſuade themſelves there is no God, becauſe it is convenient for them there ſhould be none; and whether *David* meant ſo or not, it is very probable that ſome may arrive to that height of impiety, as for a time at leaſt, and in ſome moods, to diſbelieve a God, and to be very confident of the arguments on that ſide. But what then? Is the knowledge and belief of a God therefore not natural to mankind? Nature itſelf, as conſtant and uniform as it is, admits of ſome irregularities and exceptions, in effects that are merely natural, much more in thoſe which have ſomething in them that is voluntary, and depends upon the good or bad uſe of our reaſon and underſtanding; and there is no arguing from what is *monſtrous*, againſt what is *natural*. It is natural for men to have five fingers upon a hand, and yet ſome are born otherwiſe: but in voluntary agents, that which is natural may be perverted, and in a great meaſure extinguiſh'd in ſome particular inſtances; ſo that there is no force at all in this objection.

His *fourth* and laſt argument is, that there have not only been particular perſons, but whole nations who have had no ſenſe, nor ſo much as ſuſpicion of a Deity. This I confeſs were of great force, if it were true; and for the proof of this, he produceth the inſtance of *Braſil* in *America*. But I utterly deny the matter of fact and hiſtory, and challenge any man to bring good teſtimony, not only of any nation, but of any city in the world, that ever were *profeſſed Atheiſts*.

I know this was affirmed of ſome part of *Braſil*, by ſome of the firſt diſcoverers, who yet at the ſame time owned, that theſe very people did moſt expreſly believe the immortality of the ſoul, and the rewards and puniſhments of another life; opinions which no man can well reconcile with the denial and diſbelief of a Deity. But to put an end to this argument, later and more perfect diſcoveries have found this not to be true, and do aſſure us upon better acquaintance with thoſe barbarous people, that they are deeply poſſeſs'd with the belief of *one ſupreme God, who made and governs the world*.

Having thus given a particular anſwer to *Socinus* his arguments againſt the natural knowledge of a God, I will now briefly offer ſome arguments for it. And to prove that the knowledge and belief of a God is natural to mankind, my

Firſt argument ſhall be from the univerſal conſent, in this matter, of all nations in all ages. And this is an argument of great force, there being no better way to prove any thing to be natural to any kind of being, than if it be generally found in the whole kind. *Omnium conſenſus naturæ vox eſt*, "the conſent of all is the voice of nature, ſaith "*Tully*." And indeed by what other argument can we prove that reaſon, and ſpeech, and an inclination to ſociety are natural to men; but that theſe belong to the whole kind?

Secondly, Unleſs the knowledge of God and his eſſential perfections be natural, I do not ſee what ſufficient and certain foundation there can be of revealed religion. For unleſs we naturally know God to be a Being of all perfection, and conſequently that whatever he ſays is true, I cannot ſee what divine revelation can ſignify. For God's revealing or declaring ſuch a thing to us, is no neceſſary argument that it is ſo, unleſs antecedently to this revelation we be poſſeſs'd firmly with this principle, that whatever God ſays is true. And whatever is known antecedently to revelation, muſt be known by natural light, and by reaſonings and deductions from natural principles. I might farther add to this argument, that the only ſtandard and meaſure to judge of divine revelations, and to diſtinguiſh between what are true, and what are conterfeit, are the natural notions which men have of God, and of his eſſential perfections.

Thirdly, If the notion of a God be not natural, I do not ſee how men can have any natural notion of the difference of moral good and evil, juſt and unjuſt. For if I do not naturally know there is a God, how can I naturally know that there is any law obliging to the one, and forbidding the other? All law and obligation to obedience, neceſſarily ſuppoſing the authority of a ſuperior Being. But the Apoſtle expreſsly aſſerts, that *the Gentiles* who were deſtitute of a revealed law, *were a law unto themſelves*; but there cannot be a natural law obliging mankind, unleſs God be naturally known to them.

And this *Socinus* himſelf in his diſcourſe upon this very argument is forced to acknowledge. "In all men (ſays he) there is naturally a difference of juſt and unjuſt, or at "leaſt there is planted in all men an acknowledgment that juſt ought to be preferr'd "before unjuſt, and that which is honeſt, before the contrary; and this is nothing elſe "but the word of God within a man, which whoſoever obeys, in ſo doing obeys God, "tho' otherwiſe he neither know nor think there is a God; and there is no doubt but "he that thus obeys God, is accepted of him." So that here is an acknowledgment of a natural obligation to a law, without any natural knowledge of a ſuperior authority; which I think cannot be; and which is worſe, that a man may obey God acceptably, without knowing and believing there is a God; which directly thwarts the ground of his firſt argument, from thoſe words of the Apoſtle, *without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God; for he that cometh to God*, that is, he that will be religious and pleaſe God, *muſt believe that he is*: ſo hard is it for any man to contradict *nature*, without contradicting *himſelf*.

Fourthly, My laſt argument I ground upon the words of the Apoſtle in my Text, *that which may be known of God, is manifeſt in them; for God hath ſhewed it unto them. Is manifeſt in them,* ἐν αὐτοῖς *among them.* God hath ſufficiently manifeſted it to mankind. And which way hath God done this? by revelation? or by the natural light of reaſon? He tells us at the 20th verſe. *For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen*, that is, God, who in himſelf is inviſible, ever ſince he hath created the world, hath given a viſible demonſtration of himſelf, that is, of *his eternal power and Godhead, being underſtood by the things which are made.* The plain ſenſe of the whole is, that this wiſe and wonderful frame of the world, which cannot reaſonably be aſcribed to any other cauſe but God, is a ſenſible demonſtration to all mankind, of an eternal and powerful Being that was the author and framer of it. The only queſtion now is, whether this text ſpeaks of the knowledge of God by particular revelation, or by natural light and reaſon, from the contemplation of the works of God; *Socinus* having no other way to avoid the force of this text, will needs underſtand it of the knowledge of God by the revelation of the Goſpel. His words are theſe: "The Apoſtle therefore ſays in this place, that the eternal Godhead of God, that is, "that which God would always have us to do (for *the Godhead* is ſometimes taken "in this ſenſe) and his eternal power, that is, his promiſe which never fails (in which "ſenſe he ſaid a little before that the Goſpel is the power of God) theſe, I ſay, which were "never ſeen by men, that is, were never known to them ſince the creation of the "world, are known by his works, that is, by the wonderful operation of God, and "divine men, eſpecially of Chriſt and his Apoſtles." Theſe are his very words, and now I refer it to any indifferent judgment, whether this be not a very forced and conſtrained interpretation of this text; and whether that which I have before given, be not infinitely more free and natural, and every way more agreeable to the obvious ſenſe of the words, and the ſcope of the Apoſtle's argument. For he plainly ſpeaks of the *heathen*, and proves them to be *inexcuſable*, becauſe *they held the truth in unrighteouſneſs*, and having a natural knowledge of God, from the contemplation of his works, and the things which are made, *they did not glorify him as God.* And therefore I ſhall not trouble myſelf to give any other anſwer to it; for by the abſurd violence of it in every part, it confutes itſelf more effectually than any diſcourſe about it can do.

I have been the larger upon this, becauſe it is a matter of ſo great conſequence, and lies at the bottom of all religion. For the natural knowledge which men have of God, is, when all is done, the ſureſt and faſteſt hold that religion hath on human nature. Beſides, how ſhould God judge that part of the world who are wholly deſtitute of divine revelation, if they had no natural knowledge of him, and conſequently could not be under the direction and government of any law? For *where there is no law, there is no tranſgreſſion*; and where men are guilty of the breach of no law, they cannot be judged and condemned for it; for *the judgment of God is according to truth.*

And now this being eſtabliſh'd, that men have a natural knowledge of God; if they contradict it by their life and practice, they are guilty of *retaining the truth of God in unrighteouſneſs.* For by this argument the Apoſtle proves the *heathen* to be guilty of *holding the truth in unrighteo*[illegible] becauſe notwithſtanding the natural knowledge which they had of God *by the thin*[illegible]*ch are made*, they lived in the practice of groſs idolatry, and the moſt abominable ſins and vices.

And this concerns us much more, who have the glorious light of the Goſpel added to the light of nature. For if they who offended againſt the light of nature, were liable to the judgment of God, of how much ſorer puniſhment ſhall we be thought worthy, if we neglect thoſe infinite advantages which the revelation of the Goſpel hath ſuperadded to natural light? He hath now ſet our duty in the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt light that ever was afforded to mankind, ſo that if we will not now believe and repent, there is no remedy for us, but we muſt *die in our ſins*; *if we ſin wilfully, after* ſo much *knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin; but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to conſume us.*

The ſum of what hath been ſaid on this argument is briefly this; that men have a natural knowledge of God, and of thoſe great duties which reſult from the knowledge of him; ſo that whatever men ſay and pretend, as to the main things of religion, *the worſhip of God, and juſtice* and *righteouſneſs towards men*, ſetting aſide divine revelation, we are all naturally convinc'd of our duty, and of what we ought to do, and thoſe who live in a bad courſe, need only be put in mind of what they naturally know, better than any body elſe can tell them, that they are in a bad courſe: ſo that I may appeal to all wicked men, from *themſelves*, raſh, and heated, and intoxicated with pleaſure and vanity, tranſported and hurried away by luſt and paſſion; to *themſelves*, ſerious and compoſed, and in a cool and conſiderate temper. And can any ſober man forbear to follow the convictions of his own mind, and to reſolve to do what he inwardly conſents to as beſt? Let us but be true to ourſelves, and obey the dictates of our own minds, and give leave to our own conſciences to counſel us, and tell us what we ought to do, and we ſhall be *a law to ourſelves.* I proceed to the

Sixth and laſt obſervation, namely, that the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the Goſpel, againſt the impiety and unrighteouſneſs of men, is one principal thing, which renders it ſo very powerful and likely a means for the ſalvation of mankind. For the Apoſtle inſtanceth in *two* things, which give the Goſpel ſo great an advantage to this purpoſe, the *mercy* of God to penitent ſinners, and his *ſeverity* toward the impenitent; both which are ſo fully and clearly revealed in the Goſpel. *The Goſpel is the power of God to ſalvation, to every one that believeth, becauſe therein the righteouſneſs of God is revealed*; that is, his great grace and mercy in the juſtification and pardon of ſinners by Jeſus Chriſt, which I have already ſhewn to be meant by *the righteouſneſs of God*, by comparing this with the explication which is given of *the righteouſneſs of God*, Chap. iii. ver. 22.

The other reaſon which he gives of the Goſpel's being *the power of God to ſalvation*, is the plain declaration of the ſeverity of God toward impenitent ſinners, *becauſe therein* alſo *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men.* The force of which argument will appear, if we conſider theſe following particulars:

Firſt, That the declarations of the Goſpel in this matter are ſo plain and expreſs.

Secondly, That they are very dreadful and terrible.

Thirdly, That there is no ſafety or hope of impunity for men that go on and continue in their ſins.

Fourthly, That this argument will take hold of the moſt deſperate and profligate ſinners, and ſtill retain its force upon the minds of men, when all other conſiderations fail, and are of little or no efficacy. And,

Fifthly, That no religion in the world can urge this argument with that force and advantage that Chriſtianity does.

Firſt, That the declarations of the Goſpel in this matter are moſt plain and expreſs; and that not only againſt ſin and wickedneſs in general, but againſt particular ſins and vices; ſo that no man that lives in any evil and vicious courſe, can be ignorant of his danger. Our Lord hath told us in general, what ſhall be the doom of the workers of iniquity, yea, tho' they may have owned him, and made profeſſion of his name: Matt. vii. 21. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will ſay unto me in that day, Lord, Lord,* &c. *then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you, depart*

part from me ye that work iniquity. Matth. xiii. 49, 50. *So ſhall it be at the end of the world, the Angels ſhall come forth, and ſever the wicked from among the juſt, and ſhall caſt them into the furnace of fire; there ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of teeth.* Matt. xxv. 46. *The wicked ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment, but the righteous into life eternal.* John v. 28, 29. *The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves ſhall hear his voice, and ſhall come forth; they that have done good, unto the reſurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the reſurrection of damnation.* Rom. ii. 6. St. *Paul* tells us that there is *a day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil.* 2 Theſſ. i. 7, 8, 9. that *the Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty Angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; who ſhall be puniſh'd with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Nothing can be more plain and expreſs than theſe general declarations of the wrath of God againſt ſinners; that there is a day of judgment appointed, and a judge conſtituted to take cognizance of the actions of men, to paſs a ſevere ſentence, and to inflict a terrible puniſhment upon the workers of iniquity.

More particularly our Lord and his Apoſtles have denounced the wrath of God againſt particular ſins and vices. In ſeveral places of the New Teſtament, there are catalogues given of particular ſins, the practice whereof will certainly ſhut men out of the kingdom of heaven, and expoſe them to the wrath and vengeance of God. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. *Know ye not that the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God.* So likewiſe, *Gal.* v. 19, 20, 21. *The works of the fleſh are manifeſt, which are theſe, adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, ſtrife, ſeditions, hereſies, envyings, murthers, drunkenneſs, revellings, and ſuch like: of the which I tell you before, as I have alſo told you in times paſt, that they that do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Col. iii. 5, 6. *Mortify therefore your members upon earth, fornication, uncleanneſs, inordinate affection, evil concupiſcence, and covetouſneſs, which is idolatry, for which things ſake the wrath of God cometh on the children of diſobedience.* Rev. xxi. 8. *The fearful and unbelieving,* (that is, thoſe who rejected the Chriſtian religion, notwithſtanding the clear evidence that was offer'd for it, and thoſe who out of fear ſhould apoſtatize from it) *The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable,* (that is, thoſe who were guilty of unnatural luſts, not fit to be named) *and murderers, and whoremongers, and ſorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars* (that is, all ſorts of falſe and deceitful and perfidious perſons) *ſhall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimſtone, which is the ſecond death.*

And not only theſe groſs and notorious ſins, which are ſuch plain violations of the law and light of nature; but thoſe wherein mankind have been apt to take more liberty, as if they were not ſufficiently convinced of the evil of them; as *the reſiſting of civil authority,* which the Apoſtle tells us, they that are guilty of, *ſhall receive to themſelves damnation,* Rom. xiii. 2. *Prophane ſwearing in common converſation,* which St. *James* tells us brings men under the danger of *damnation,* ch. v. 12. *Above all things, my brethren, ſwear not; leſt ye fall under condemnation.* Nay, our Saviour hath told us plainly, that not only for *wicked actions,* but for *every evil and ſinful word,* men are obnoxious to the judgment of God. So our Lord aſſures us, *Mat.* xii. 36, 37. *I ſay unto you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy words thou ſhalt be condemned.* He had ſpoken before of that great and unpardonable ſin of *blaſpheming the Holy Ghoſt*; and becauſe this might be thought great ſeverity for evil words, he declares the reaſon more fully, becauſe words ſhew the mind and temper of the man, *ver.* 34. *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh.* "The character of the "man is ſhewn by his words, ſaith *Menander. Profert enim mores plerumque oratio* (ſaith *Quintilian*) *& animi ſecreta detegit*; "A man's ſpeech diſcovers his manners, and "the ſecrets of his heart; *ut vivit etiam quemque dicere,* Men commonly ſpeak as they live; and therefore our Saviour adds, *A good man out of the good treaſure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treaſure of his heart bringeth forth evil things: but I ſay unto you, that every idle word,* πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν, by which I do not think our Saviour means, that men ſhould be called to a ſolemn account at the day of judgment, for *every trifling*, and *impertinent*, and *unprofitable word*, but *every wicked and ſinful word* of any kind: as if he had ſaid, Do you think this ſevere, to make words an unpardonable fault? I ſay unto you, that men ſhall not only be condemned for their *malicious* and *blaſphemous* ſpeeches againſt the Holy Ghoſt; but they ſhall likewiſe give a ſtrict account for all other *wicked and ſinful ſpeeches* in any kind, tho' much inferior to this. And this is not only moſt agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour, but is confirmed by ſome Greek copies, in which it is πᾶν ῥῆμα πονηρὸν, *every wicked word which men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall be accountable for it at the day of judgment.* But this by the bye.

Our Saviour likewiſe tells us, that men ſhall not only be proceeded againſt for ſins of *commiſſion*, but for the bare *omiſſion* and *neglect* of their duty, eſpecially in works of mercy and charity; for *not feeding the hungry*, and the like, as we ſee, *Mat.* xxv. and that for the omiſſion of theſe, he will paſs that terrible ſentence, *Depart ye curſed*, &c. So that it nearly concerns us to be careful of our whole life, of all our words and actions, ſince the Goſpel hath ſo plainly and expreſſly declared, that *for all theſe things God will bring us into judgment.* And if the threatenings of the Goſpel be true, *what manner of perſons ought we to be, in all holy converſation and godlineſs?*

Secondly, As the threatenings of the Goſpel are very plain and expreſs, ſo are they likewiſe very dreadful and terrible. I want words to expreſs the leaſt part of the terror of them; and yet the expreſſions of Scripture concerning the miſery and puniſhment of ſinners in another world, are ſuch as may juſtly raiſe amazement and horror in thoſe that hear them. Sometimes it is expreſs'd by *a departing from God*, and a perpetual baniſhment *from his preſence*, who is the fountain of all comfort, and joy, and happineſs; ſometimes by *the loſs of our ſouls*, or *ourſelves. What ſhall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul?* or, (as it is in another evangeliſt) *to loſe himſelf?* Not that our being ſhall be deſtroyed; that would be a happy loſs indeed, to him that is ſentenced to be for ever miſerable; but the man ſhall ſtill remain, and his body and ſoul continue to be the foundation of his miſery, and a ſcene of perpetual woe and diſcontent, which our Saviour calls *the deſtroying of body and ſoul in hell*, or *going into everlaſting puniſhment, where there ſhall be wailing and gnaſhing of teeth, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.* Could I repreſent to you the horror of that diſmal priſon, into which wicked and impure ſouls are to be thruſt, and the miſery they muſt there endure, without the leaſt ſpark of comfort, or glimmering of hope, how they wail and groan under the intolerable wrath of God, the inſolent ſcorn and cruelty of Devils, the ſevere laſhes and ſtings, raging anguiſh and horrible deſpair of their own minds, without intermiſſion, without pity, without hope of ever ſeeing an end of that miſery, which yet is inſupportable for one moment; could I repreſent theſe things to you according to the terror of them, what effect muſt they have upon us? and with what patience could any man bear to think of plunging himſelf into this miſery? and by his own wilful fault and folly to endanger his *coming into this place* and ſtate *of torments?* eſpecially if we conſider in the

Third place, that the Goſpel hath likewiſe declared, that there is no avoiding of this miſery, no hopes of impunity, if men go on and continue in their ſins. The terms of the goſpel in this are peremptory, that *except we repent, we ſhall periſh*; that *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*; that *the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God.* And this is a very preſſing conſideration, and brings the matter to a ſhort and plain iſſue. Either we muſt leave our ſins, or die in them; either we muſt repent of them, or be judged for them; either we muſt forſake our ſins, and break off that wicked courſe which we have lived in, or we muſt quit all hopes of heaven and happineſs, nay, we cannot *eſcape the damnation of hell.* The clear revelation of a future judgment is ſo preſſing an argument to repentance, as no man can in reaſon reſiſt, that hath not a mind to be miſerable. *Now* (ſaith St. *Paul* to the *Athenians*) *he ſtraightly chargeth all men every where to repent, becauſe he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs.*

Men may cheat themſelves, or ſuffer themſelves to be deluded by others, about ſeveral means and devices of reconciling a wicked life, with the hopes of heaven and eternal ſalvation; as by mingling ſome pangs of ſorrow for ſin, and ſome hot fits of devotion with a ſinful life; which is only the interruption of a wicked courſe, without reformation and amendment of life: but *let no man deceive you with vain words*; for our bleſſed Saviour hath provided no other ways to ſave men, but upon the terms of repentance and obedience.

Fourthly, This argument takes hold of the moſt deſperate and profligate ſinners, and ſtill retains its force upon the minds of men, when almoſt all other conſiderations fail, and have loſt their efficacy upon us. Many men are gone ſo far in an evil courſe, that neither ſhame of their vices, nor the love of God and virtue, nor the hopes of heaven are of any force with them, to reclaim them and bring them to a better mind: but there is one handle yet left, whereby to lay hold of them, and that is their *fear*. This is a paſſion that lies deep in our nature, being founded in ſelf-preſervation, and ſticks ſo cloſe to us, that we cannot quit ourſelves of it, nor ſhake it off. Men may put off ingenuity, and break thro' all obligations of gratitude. Men may harden their foreheads, and conquer all ſenſe of ſhame; but they can never perfectly ſtifle and ſubdue their *fears*; they can hardly ſo extinguiſh *the fear of hell*, but that ſome ſparks of that fire will ever and anon be flying about in their conſciences, eſpecially when they are made ſober, and brought to themſelves by affliction, and by the preſent apprehenſions of death have a nearer ſight of another world. And if it was ſo hard for the heathen to conquer theſe apprehenſions, how much harder muſt it be to Chriſtians, who have ſo much greater aſſurance of theſe things, and to whom *the wrath of God is* ſo clearly *revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men?*

Fifthly, No religion in the world ever urged this argument upon men, with that force and advantage which Chriſtianity does. The philoſophy of the heathen gave men no ſteady aſſurance of the thing; the moſt knowing perſons among them were not agreed about a future ſtate; the greateſt part of them ſpake but doubtfully concerning another life. And beſides the natural jealouſies and ſuſpicions of mankind concerning theſe things, they had only ſome fair probabilities of reaſon, and the authority of their Poets, who talkt they knew not what about *the Eliſian fields*, and *the infernal regions*, and *the three judges of hell*; ſo that the wiſeſt among them had hardly aſſurance enough in themſelves of the truth of the thing, to preſs it upon others with any great confidence, and therefore it was not likely to have any great efficacy upon the generality of mankind.

As for the Jewiſh religion; tho' that ſuppoſed and took for granted the rewards of another world, as a principle of natural religion; yet in the law of *Moſes* there was no particular and expreſs revelation of the life of the world to come; and what was deduced from it, was by remote and obſcure conſequence. Temporal promiſes and threatnings it had many and clear, and their eyes were ſo dazzled with theſe, that it is probable that the generality of them did but little conſider a future ſtate, till they fell into great temporal calamities under the *Grecian* and *Roman* empires, whereby they were almoſt neceſſarily awaken'd to the conſideration and hopes of a better life, to relieve them under their preſent evils and ſufferings; and yet even in that time they were divided into two great factions about this matter, the one affirming, and the other as confidently denying any life after this. *But the goſpel hath brought life and immortality to light*, and we are aſſured *from heaven* of the truth and reality of another ſtate, and a future judgment. The Son of God was ſent into the world to preach this doctrine, and roſe again from the dead, and was taken up into heaven, for a viſible demonſtration to all mankind of another life after this, and conſequently of a future judgment, which no man ever doubted of, that did firmly believe a future ſtate.

The ſum of all that I have ſaid is this; the Goſpel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to ſalvation is by forſaking our ſins, and living a holy and virtuous life; and the moſt effectual argument in the world to perſuade men to this, is the conſideration of the infinite danger that a ſinful courſe expoſeth men to, ſince *the wrath of God* continually hangs over ſinners, and if they continue in their ſins, will certainly fall upon them, and overwhelm them with miſery, and he that is not moved by this argument, is loſt to all intents and purpoſes.

All that now remains, is to urge this argument upon men, and from the ſerious conſideration of it, to perſuade them to repent, and reform their wicked lives. And was there ever age wherein this was more needful? when *iniquity* doth not only *abound*, but even *rage* among us; when infidelity and profaneneſs, and all manner of lewdneſs and vice appears ſo boldly and openly, and men commit the greateſt abominations without bluſhing at them; when vice hath got ſuch head that it can hardly bear to be check'd and controll'd, and when, as the *Roman* hiſtorian complains of his times, *ad ea tempora, quibus nec vitia noſtra nec remedia pati poſſumus, perventum eſt*; "things are come to "that paſs, that we can neither bear our vices, nor the remedies of them." Our vices are grown to a prodigious and intolerable height, and yet men hardly have the patience to hear of them; and ſurely a diſeaſe is then dangerous indeed, when it cannot bear the ſeverity that is neceſſary to a cure. But yet, notwithſtanding this, we who are the meſſengers of God to men, to warn them of their ſin and danger, muſt not keep ſilence, and ſpare to tell them both of their ſins, and of the judgment of God which hangs over them; *that God will viſit for theſe things*, and that *his ſoul will be avenged on ſuch a nation as this.* At leaſt we may have leave to warn others, who are not yet *run to the ſame exceſs of riot, to ſave themſelves from this untoward generation. God's judgments are abroad in the earth*, and call aloud upon us, *to learn righteouſneſs.*

But this is but a ſmall conſideration, in compariſon of the judgment of another world, which we who call ourſelves Chriſtians do profeſs to believe, as one of the chief articles of our faith. The conſideration of this ſhould check and cool us in the heat of all our ſinful pleaſures; and that bitter irony of *Solomon* ſhould cut us to the heart; *Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; but know that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.* Think often and ſeriouſly on that time, wherein *the wrath of God*, which is now *revealed againſt ſin*, ſhall be *executed* upon ſinners; and if we believe this, we are ſtrangely ſtupid and obſtinate, if we be not moved by it. The aſſurance of this made St. *Paul* extremely importunate in exhorting men to avoid ſo great danger, 2 *Cor.* v. 10, 11. *We muſt all appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or evil. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we perſuade men.* And if this ought to move us to take ſo great a care of *others*, much more of *ourſelves.* The judgment to come is a very amazing conſideration, it is a fearful thing to hear of it, but it will be much more terrible to ſee it, eſpecially to thoſe whoſe guilt muſt needs make them ſo heartily concerned in the diſmal conſequences of it; and yet as ſure as I ſtand, and you ſit here, *this great and terrible day of the Lord will come*, and *who may abide his coming!* what will we do, when that day ſhall ſurprize us careleſs and unprepared! what unſpeakable horror and amazement will then take hold of us! when *lifting up our eyes to heaven, we ſhall ſee the Son of man coming in the clouds of it, with power and great glory*; when that powerful voice which ſhall pierce the ears of the dead ſhall ring through the world, *Ariſe ye dead, and come to judgment*; when the mighty *trumpet* ſhall ſound, and wake the ſleepers of a thouſand years, and ſummon the diſperſed parts of the bodies of all men that ever lived, to rally together and take their place; and the ſouls and bodies of men which have been ſo long ſtrangers to one another, ſhall meet and be united again, to receive the doom due to their deeds; what fear ſhall then ſurprize ſinners, and how will they tremble at the preſence of the great Judge, and *for the glory of his Majeſty!* how will their conſciences fly in their faces, and their own hearts condemn them, for their wicked and ungodly lives, and even prevent that ſentence which yet ſhall certainly be paſs'd and executed upon them! But I will proceed no farther in this argument, which hath ſo much of terror in it.

I will conclude my ſermon, as *Solomon* doth his *Eccleſiaſtes*, Chap. xii. 13, 14. *Let us hear the concluſion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man; for God ſhall bring every work into judgment, and every ſecret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* To which I will only add that ſerious and merciful admonition of *a greater than Solomon*, I mean the great Judge of the whole world, our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, *Luke* xxi. 34, 35, 36. *Take heed to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be overcharged with ſurfeiting, and drunkenneſs, and the cares of this life, and ſo that day come upon you at unawares. For as a ſnare ſhall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to eſcape all theſe things that ſhall come to paſs, and to ſtand before the Son of man:* To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, &c.

SERMON LIX.

Knowledge and Practice Neceſſary in Religion.

JOHN xiii. 17.

If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.

TWO things make up religion, the *knowledge* and the *practice* of it; and the *firſt* is wholly in order to the *ſecond*; and God hath not revealed to us the knowledge of himſelf and his will merely for the improvement of our underſtanding, but for the bettering of our hearts and lives; not to entertain our minds with the ſpeculations of religion and virtue, but to form and govern our actions. *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

In which words, our bleſſed Saviour does from a particular inſtance take occaſion to ſettle a general concluſion; namely, that religion doth mainly conſiſt in practice, and that the knowledge of his doctrine without the real effects of it upon our lives, will bring no man to heaven. In the beginning of this chapter, our great Lord and Maſter, to teſtify his love to his diſciples, and to give them a lively inſtance and example of that great virtue of humility, is pleaſed to condeſcend to a very low and mean office, ſuch as was uſed to be performed by ſervants to their maſters, and not by the maſter to his ſervants; namely, to waſh their feet; and when he had done this, he aſks them if they did underſtand the meaning of this ſtrange action. *Know ye what I have done unto you? ye call me Maſter, and Lord, and ye ſay well, for ſo I am: If I then your Lord and Maſter have waſhed your feet, ye alſo ought to waſh one anothers feet; for I have given you an example, that ye ſhould do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, the ſervant is not greater than the Lord, neither he that is ſent, greater than he that ſent him; if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* As if he had ſaid, This which I have now done, is eaſy to be underſtood, and ſo likewiſe are all thoſe other chriſtian graces and virtues, which I have heretofore by my doctrine and example recommended to you; but it is not enough to *know* theſe things, but ye muſt likewiſe *do* them. The end and the life of all our knowledge in religion, is to put in practice what we know. It is neceſſary indeed that we ſhould know our duty, but knowledge alone will never bring us to that happineſs, which religion deſigns to make us partakers of, if our knowledge have not its due and proper influence upon our lives. Nay, ſo far will our knowledge be from making us happy, if it be ſeparated from the virtues of a good life, that it will prove one of the heavieſt aggravations of our miſery; and it is as if he had ſaid, *If ye know theſe things, wo be unto you, if ye do them not.*

From theſe words then, I ſhall obſerve theſe *three* things, which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to.

Firſt, That the knowledge of God's will, and our duty, is neceſſary to the practice of it; *if ye know theſe things*, which ſuppoſeth that we muſt *know* our duty, before we can *do* it.

Secondly, That the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be, and too often are ſeparated. This likewiſe the text ſuppoſeth, that men may *know* their duty, and yet not *do* it; and that this is very frequent, which is the reaſon why our Saviour gives this caution.

Thirdly, That the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs; *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.* I begin with the

Firſt of theſe, namely, That the knowledge of God's will and our duty is neceſſary in order to the practice of it. The truth of this propoſition is ſo clear and evident at firſt view, that nothing can obſcure it, and bring it in queſtion, but to endeavour to prove it; and therefore inſtead of ſpending time in that, I ſhall take occaſion from it, juſtly to reprove that prepoſterous courſe which is taken, and openly avowed and juſtified by ſome, as the ſafeſt and beſt way to make men religious, and to bring them to happineſs; namely, by taking away from them the means of knowledge; as if the beſt way to bring men *to do the will of God*, were to keep men from *knowing it*. For what elſe can be the meaning of that maxim ſo current in the Church of *Rome*, that *ignorance is the mother of devotion?* or of that ſtrange and injurious practice of theirs of locking up from the people that great ſtore-houſe and treaſury of divine knowledge, *the holy ſcriptures*, in an unknown tongue?

I know very well, that in juſtification of this hard uſage of their people it is pretended that knowledge is apt to puff men up, to make them proud and contentious, refractory and diſobedient, and heretical, and what not? and particularly, that the free and familiar uſe of the holy ſcriptures permitted to the people, hath miniſtred occaſion to the people of falling into great and dangerous errors, and of making great diſturbance and diviſions among Chriſtians. For anſwer to this pretence, I deſire theſe *four or five* things may be conſidered.

Firſt, That unleſs this be the *natural* and *neceſſary* effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free uſe of the holy ſcriptures, there is no force in this reaſon; and if this be the *proper* and *natural* effect of this knowledge, then this reaſon will reach a great way farther, than thoſe who make uſe of it are willing it ſhould.

Secondly, That this is not the *natural* and neceſſary effect of knowledge in religion, but only *accidental*, and proceeding from mens abuſe of it; for which the thing itſelf is not to be taken away.

Thirdly, That the proper and natural effects and conſequences of *ignorance*, are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than thoſe which are accidentally occaſion'd by *knowledge*.

Fourthly, That if this reaſon be good, it is much ſtronger for withholding the Scriptures from the Prieſts and the learned, than from the people.

Fifthly, That this danger was as great, and as well known in the Apoſtles times, and yet they took a quite contrary courſe.

Firſt, I deſire it may be conſider'd that unleſs this be the *natural* and *neceſſary* effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free uſe of the holy Scriptures, there is no force in this reaſon; for that which is *neceſſary*, or *highly uſeful*, ought not to be taken away, becauſe it is liable to be perverted, and abuſed to ill purpoſes. If it ought, then not only knowledge in religion, but all other knowledge ought to be reſtrained and ſuppreſs'd; for all knowledge is apt to *puff up*, and liable to be abuſed to many ill purpoſes. At this rate, light, and liberty, and reaſon, yea and life itſelf, ought all to be taken away, becauſe they are all greatly abuſed by many men, to ſome ill purpoſes or other; ſo that unleſs theſe ill effects do *naturally* and *neceſſarily* ſpring from knowledge in religion, the objection from them is of no force; and if they do *neceſſarily* flow from it, then this reaſon will reach a great way farther than thoſe that make uſe of it are willing it ſhould; for if this be true, that the knowledge of religion, as it is revealed in the holy Scriptures, is *of its own nature* ſo pernicious, as to make men proud and contentious and heretical, and diſobedient to authority, then the blame of all this would fall upon our bleſſed Saviour, for revealing ſo pernicious a doctrine, and upon his Apoſtles for publiſhing this doctrine in a known tongue to all mankind, and thereby laying the foundation of perpetual ſchiſms and hereſies in the church.

Secondly, But this is not the *natural* and *neceſſary* effect of knowledge in religion, but only *accidental*, and proceeding from mens abuſe of it, for which the thing itſelf ought not to be taken away. And thus much certainly they will grant, becauſe it cannot with any face be denied; and if ſo, then the means of knowledge are not to be denied, but only men are to be cautioned not to pervert and abuſe them. And if any man abuſe the holy Scriptures to the patronizing of error or hereſy, or to any other bad purpoſe, he does it at his peril, and muſt give an account to God for it, but ought not to be deprived of the means of knowledge, for fear he ſhould make an ill uſe of them. We muſt not hinder men from being *Chriſtians*, to preſerve them from being *Hereticks*, and put out mens eyes, for fear they ſhould ſome time or other take upon them to diſpute their way with their guides.

I remember that St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* viii. 1. takes notice of this *accidental* inconvenience of *knowledge*, that *it puffeth up*, and that this pride occaſioned great contentions and diviſions among them: but the remedy which he preſcribes againſt this miſchief of knowledge is not to with-hold from men the means of it, and to celebrate the ſervice of God, the prayers of the church, and the reading of the Scriptures *in an unknown tongue*, but quite contrary, *Chap.* xiv. of that epiſtle, he ſtrictly enjoins that the ſervice of God in the church be ſo performed, as may be for the *edification* of the people; which he ſays cannot be, if it be celebrated *in an unknown tongue*; and the remedy he preſcribes againſt the *accidental* miſchief and inconvenience of knowledge, is not *ignorance*, but *charity*, to govern their knowledge, and to help them to make right uſe of it; *ver.* 20. of that chap. after he had declared that the ſervice of God ought to be performed *in a known tongue*, he immediately adds, *Brethren, be not children in underſtanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in underſtanding be ye men.* He commends knowledge, he encourageth it, he requires it of all Chriſtians; ſo far is he from checking the purſuit of it, and depriving the people of the means of it. And indeed there is nothing in the Chriſtian religion, but what is fit for every man to know, becauſe there is nothing in it, but what is deſigned to promote holineſs and a good life; and if men make any other uſe of their knowledge, it is their own fault, for it certainly tends to make men good; and being ſo uſeful and neceſſary to ſo good a purpoſe, men ought not to be debarr'd of it.

Thirdly, Let it be conſider'd, that the *proper* and *natural* effects and conſequences of *ignorance* are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than thoſe which are *accidentally* occaſion'd by *knowledge*; for ſo far as a man is ignorant of his duty, it is impoſſible he ſhould do it. He that hath the knowledge of religion, may be a bad Chriſtian, but he that is deſtitute of it, can be none at all. Or if ignorance do beget and promote ſome kind of devotion in men, it is ſuch a devotion as is not properly *religion*, but *ſuperſtition*; the ignorant man may be *zealouſly ſuperſtitious*, but without ſome meaſure of knowledge no man can be *truly religious. That the ſoul be without knowledge it is not good*, ſays *Solomon*, *Prov.* xix. 2. becauſe good practices depend upon our knowledge, and muſt be directed by it; whenas a man that is trained up only to the outward performance of ſome things in religion, as to the ſaying over ſo many prayers in an unknown tongue, this man cannot be *truly religious*, becauſe nothing is *religious*, that is not *a reaſonable ſervice*; and no ſervice can be *reaſonable*, that is not directed by our *underſtanding*. Indeed, if the end of prayer were only to give God to underſtand what we want, it were all one what language we prayed in, and whether we underſtood what we aſked of him or not: but ſo long as the end of prayer is to teſtify the ſenſe of our own wants, and of our dependance upon God for the ſupply of them, it is impoſſible that any man ſhould in any tolerable propriety of ſpeech be ſaid *to pray*, who does not underſtand what he aſks; and the ſaying over ſo many *Pater Noſters* by one that does not underſtand the meaning of them, is no more *a prayer*, than the repeating over ſo many verſes in *Virgil*. And if this were good reaſoning, that men muſt not be permitted to know ſo much as they can in religion, for fear they ſhould grow troubleſome with their knowledge, then certainly the beſt way in the world to maintain peace in the Chriſtian church, would be to let the people know nothing at all in religion; and the beſt way to ſecure the ignorance of the people would be to keep the prieſts as ignorant as the people, and then to be ſure they could teach them nothing; but then the miſchief would be, that out of a fondneſs to maintain peace in the Chriſtian church, there would be no church, nor no Chriſtianity; which would be the ſame wiſe contrivance, as if a Prince ſhould deſtroy his ſubjects, to keep his kingdom quiet.

Fourthly, Let us likewiſe conſider, that if this reaſon be good, it is much ſtronger for withholding the Scriptures from the Prieſts, and the learned, than from the people; becauſe the danger of ſtarting errors and hereſies, and countenancing them from Scripture, and managing them plauſibly and with advantage, is much more to be feared from the learned, than from the common people; and the experience of all ages hath ſhewn, that the great broachers and abetters of hereſy in the Chriſtian church, have been men of learning and wit; and moſt of the famous hereſies, that are recorded in eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, have their names from ſome learned man or other; ſo that it is a great miſtake to think that the way to prevent error and hereſy in the church, is to take the Bible out of the hands of the people, ſo long as the free uſe of it is permitted to men of learning and ſkill, in whoſe hands the danger of perverting it is much greater. The antient fathers, I am ſure, do frequently preſcribe to the people the conſtant and careful reading of the holy Scriptures, as the ſureſt antidote againſt the poiſon of dangerous errors, and damnable hereſies; and if there be ſo much danger of ſeduction into error from the oracles of truth, by what other or better means can we hope to be ſecured againſt this danger? if *the word of God* be ſo croſs and improper a means to this end, one would think that the *teachings of men* ſhould be much leſs effectual; ſo that men muſt either be left in their ignorance, or they muſt be permitted to learn from *the word of truth*; and whatever force this reaſon of the danger of hereſy hath in it, to deprive the common people of the uſe of the Scriptures, I am ſure it is much ſtronger to wreſt them out of the hands of the Prieſts and the learned, becauſe they are much more capable of perverting them to ſo bad a purpoſe.

Fifthly, and laſtly, This danger was as great and viſible in the age of the Apoſtles, as it is now, and yet they took a quite contrary courſe: there were hereſies then, as well as now, and either the Scriptures were not thought by being in the hands of the people to be the cauſe of them, or they did not think the taking of them out of their hands a proper remedy. The Apoſtles in all their epiſtles do earneſtly exhort the people *to grow in knowledge*, and commend them for *ſearching the Scriptures*, and charge them that *the word of God ſhould dwell richly in them.* And St. *Peter* takes particular notice of ſome men wreſting ſome difficult paſſages in St. *Paul's* epiſtles, as likewiſe in the other Scriptures, to their own deſtruction, 2 *Pet.* iii. 16. where ſpeaking of St. *Paul's* epiſtles, he ſays, *there are ſome things hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures, to their own deſtruction.* Here the danger objected is taken notice of; but the remedy preſcribed by St. *Peter*, is not to take from the people the uſe of the Scriptures, and to keep them in ignorance; but after he had cautioned againſt the like weakneſs and errors, he exhorts them to *grow in knowledge*, ver. 17, 18, *Ye therefore, beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe things before*, (that is, ſeeing ye are ſo plainly told and warned of this danger) *beware leſt ye alſo being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*, (that is, of the Chriſtian religion;) believing, it ſeems, that the more knowledge they had in religion, the leſs they would be in danger of falling into damnable errors. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, *viz.* That the *knowledge* of our duty, and the *practice* of it, may and often are ſeparated. This likewiſe is ſuppoſed in the text, that men may, and often do know the will of God, and their duty, and yet fail in the practice of it. Our Saviour elſewhere ſuppoſeth, that many *know their maſter's will, who do not do it*; and he compares thoſe *that hear his ſayings, and do them not, to a fooliſh man that built his houſe upon the ſand.* And St. *James* ſpeaks of ſome, *who are hearers of the word only, but not doers of it*, and for that reaſon fall ſhort of happineſs. And this is no wonder, becauſe the attaining to that knowledge of religion which is neceſſary to ſalvation is no difficult taſk. A great part of it is written in our hearts, and we cannot be ignorant of it if we would; as that there is a God, and a Providence, and another ſtate after this life, wherein we ſhall be rewarded, or puniſhed, according as we have lived here in this world; that God is to be worſhipped, to be prayed to for what we want, and to be praiſed for what we enjoy. Thus far nature inſtructs men in religion, and in the great duties of morality, as juſtice and temperance, and the like. And as for revealed religion, as that Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God came in our nature to ſave us, by revealing our duty more clearly and fully to us, by giving us a more perfect example of holineſs and obedience in his own life and converſation, and by dying for our ſins, and riſing again for our juſtification; theſe are things which men may eaſily underſtand; and yet for all that, they are difficultly brought to the practice of religion.

I ſhall inſtance in three ſorts of perſons, in whom the *knowledge* of religion is more remarkably ſeparated from the *practice* of it; and for diſtinction ſake, I may call them by theſe three names; the *ſpeculative*, the *formal*, and the *hypocritical* Chriſtian. The firſt of theſe makes religion only a *ſcience*, the ſecond takes it up for a *faſhion*, the third makes ſome *worldly advantage* of it, and ſerves ſome *ſecular intereſt* and *deſign* by it. All theſe are upon ſeveral accounts concerned to underſtand ſomething of religion; but yet will not be brought to the practice of it.

The *firſt* of theſe, whom I call the *ſpeculative* Chriſtian, is he who makes religion only a *ſcience*, and ſtudies it as a piece of learning, and part of that general knowledge in which he affects the reputation of being a maſter; he hath no deſign to practiſe it, but he is loth to be ignorant of it, becauſe the knowledge of it is a good ornament of converſation, and will ſerve for diſcourſe and entertainment among thoſe who are diſpoſed to be grave and ſerious; and becauſe he does not intend to practiſe it, he paſſeth over thoſe things which are plain and eaſy to be underſtood, and applies himſelf chiefly to the conſideration of thoſe things which are more abſtruſe, and will afford matter of controverſy and ſubtle diſpute, as the doctrine of the *Trinity*, *Predeſtination*, *Free-will*, and the like. Of this temper ſeem many of the ſchool-men of old to have been, who made it their great ſtudy and buſineſs to puzzle religion, and to make every thing in it intricate, by ſtarting infinite queſtions and difficulties about the plaineſt truths; and of the ſame rank uſually are the heads and leaders of parties and factions in religion, who by needleſs controverſies, and endleſs diſputes about ſome thing or other, commonly of no great moment in religion, hinder themſelves and others from minding the practice of the great and ſubſtantial duties of a good life.

Secondly, There is the *formal* Chriſtian, who takes up religion for a *faſhion*. He is born and bred in a nation where Chriſtianity is profeſs'd, and countenanced, and therefore thinks it convenient for him to know ſomething of it. Of this ſort there are, I fear, a great many, who read the Scriptures ſometimes as others do, to know the hiſtory of it; and go to church, and hear the Goſpel preached, and by this means come in ſome meaſure to underſtand the hiſtory of our Saviour, and the chriſtian doctrine; but do not at all bend themſelves to comply with the great end and deſign of it; they do not heartily endeavour to form and faſhion their lives according to the laws and precepts of it; they think they are very good Chriſtians, if they can give an account of the Articles of their faith, profeſs their belief in God and Chriſt, and declare that they hope to be ſaved by him, tho' they take no care to keep his commandments. Theſe are they of whom our Saviour ſpeaks, *Luke* vi. 46. who *call him, Lord, Lord; but do not the things which he ſaid.*

Thirdly, *Hypocritical* Chriſtians, who make an *intereſt* of religion, and ſerve ſome *worldly deſign* by it. Theſe are concerned to underſtand religion more than ordinary, that they may counterfeit it handſomely, and may not be at a loſs when they have occaſion to put on the garb of it. And this is one part of the character which the Apoſtle gives of thoſe perſons, who he foretels would appear in the laſt days, 2 *Tim.* iii. 2. he ſays they ſhould be *lovers of their own ſelves, covetous, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God, having a form of godlineſs, but denying the power of it.*

Now theſe men do not love religion, but they have occaſion to make uſe of it, and therefore they will have no more of it than will juſt ſerve their purpoſe and deſign. And indeed he that hath any other deſign in religion than to pleaſe God, and ſave his ſoul, needs no more than ſo much knowledge of it, as will ſerve him *to act a part* in it upon occaſion. I come to the

Third and laſt obſervation, *viz.* That *the practice* of religion, and *the doing* of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs; *if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them*; not *if you know theſe thing happy are ye*; but *if ye know and do them.* Now to convince men of ſo important a truth, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe two things:

Firſt, That the Goſpel makes the *practice* of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs.

Secondly, That the nature and reaſon of the thing makes it a neceſſary qualification for it.

Firſt, The Goſpel makes the *practice* of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs. Our Saviour in his firſt Sermon, where he repeats the promiſe of bleſſedneſs ſo often, makes no promiſe of it to the *mere knowledge* of religion, but to the *habit* and *practice* of chriſtian graces and virtues, of *meekneſs*, and *humility*, and *mercifulneſs*, and *righteouſneſs*, and *peaceableneſs*, and *purity*, *and patience under ſufferings, and perſecutions for righteouſneſs ſake.* And *Matth.* vii. 22. our Saviour doth moſt fully declare, that the happineſs which he promiſes, did not belong to thoſe who made profeſſion of his name, and were ſo well acquainted with his doctrine, as to be able to inſtruct others, if themſelves in the mean time did not practiſe it: *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will ſay unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy name caſt out devils, and done many wondrous works? and then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.* Tho' they profeſs to know him, yet becauſe their lives were not anſwerable to the knowledge which they had of him, and his doctrine, he declares that *he will not know them*, but bid them *depart from him*. And then he goes on to ſhew, that tho' a man attend to the doctrine of Chriſt, and gain the knowledge of it; yet if it do not deſcend into his life, and govern his actions, all that man's hopes of heaven are fond and groundleſs; and only that man's hopes of heaven are well grounded, who *knows* the doctrine of Chriſt, and *does* it, *ver.* 24. *Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him to a wiſe man, who built his houſe upon a rock, and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock; and every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, ſhall be liken'd to a fooliſh man, who built his houſe upon the ſand, and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Tho' a man had a knowledge of religion as great and perfect as that which *Solomon* had of natural things, *large as the ſand upon the ſea-ſhore*, yet all this *knowledge* ſeparated from *practice* would be like the *ſand* alſo in another reſpect, *a weak foundation* for any man to build his hopes of happineſs upon.

To the ſame purpoſe St. *Paul* ſpeaks, *Rom.* ii. 13. *Not the hearers of the law are juſt before God; but the doers of the law ſhall be juſtified.* So likewiſe St. *James*, Chap. i. 22. *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own ſelves*; and *ver.* 25. *Whoſo looketh into the perfect law of liberty,* (that is, the law or doctrine of the Goſpel) *and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed*; and therefore he adds, that the truth and reality of religion are to be meaſured by the effects of it, in the government of our words, and ordering of our lives, *ver.* 26. *If any man among you ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to viſit the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted from the world.* Men talk of religion, and keep a great ſtir about it; but nothing will paſs for *true religion before God*, but the virtuous and charitable actions of a good life; and God will accept no man to eternal life upon any other condition. So the Apoſtle tells us moſt expreſly, *Heb.* xii. 14. *Follow peace with all men, and holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

Secondly, As God hath made the *practice* of religion a neceſſary condition of our happineſs, ſo the very nature and reaſon of the thing makes it a neceſſary qualification for it. It is neceſſary that we become like to God, in order to the enjoyment of him; and nothing makes us like to God, but the *practice* of holineſs and goodneſs. *Knowledge* indeed is a divine perfection; but that alone, as it doth not render a man like God, ſo neither doth it diſpoſe him for the enjoyment of him. If a man had the underſtanding of an Angel, he might for all that be a Devil; *he that committeth ſin is of the Devil*, and whatever knowledge ſuch a man may have, he is of a deviliſh temper and diſpoſition: *but every one that doth righteouſneſs is born of God.* By this we are *like God*, and only by our likeneſs to him, do we become capable of *the ſight* and *enjoyment* of him; therefore every man that hopes to be happy by the bleſſed ſight of God in the next life, muſt endeavour after holineſs in this life. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 1 *John* iii. 3. *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure.* A wicked temper and diſpoſition of mind is, in the very nature of the thing, utterly inconſiſtent with all reaſonable hopes of heaven.

Thus I have ſhewn that the *practice* of religion, and the *doing* of what we *know* to be our duty, is the only way to happineſs.

And now the proper inference from all this is, to put men upon the careful *practice* of religion. Let no man content himſelf with the *knowledge* of his duty, unleſs he *do* it; and to this purpoſe I ſhall briefly urge theſe *three* conſiderations.

Firſt, This is the great end of all our knowledge in religion, to *practiſe* what we *know*. The knowledge of God and of our duty hath ſo eſſential a reſpect to practice, that the Scripture will hardly allow it to be properly called *knowledge*, unleſs it have an influence upon our lives, 1 *John* ii. 3, 4. *Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that ſaith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a lyar, and the truth is not in him.*

Secondly, *Practice* is the beſt way to increaſe and perfect our *knowledge*. Knowledge directs us in our practice, but practice confirms and increaſeth our knowledge, *John* vii. 17. *If a man will do the will of God, he ſhall know of the doctrine.* The beſt way to know God, is to be like him ourſelves, and to have the lively image of his perfections imprinted upon our ſouls; and the beſt way to underſtand the Chriſtian religion, is ſeriouſly to ſet about the practice of it; this will give a man a better notion of Chriſtianity than any ſpeculation can.

Thirdly, Without the *practice* of religion, our *knowledge* will be ſo far from being any furtherance and advantage to our happineſs, that it will be one of the unhappieſt aggravations of our miſery. He that is ignorant of his duty, hath ſome excuſe to pretend for himſelf: but he that underſtands the Chriſtian religion, and does not live according to it, hath *no cloak for his ſin*. The defects of our knowledge, unleſs they be groſs and wilful, will find an eaſy pardon with God: but the faults of our lives ſhall be ſeverely puniſh'd, when we *know* our duty and would not *do* it. I will conclude with that of our Saviour, *Luke* xii. 47, 48. *That ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes; for unto whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required.* When we come into the other world, no conſideration will ſting us more, and add more to the rage of our torments than this, that we did wickedly, when we underſtood to have done better; and choſe to make ourſelves miſerable, when we knew ſo well the way to have been happy.

SERMON LX.

Practice in Religion neceſſary, in proportion to our Knowledge.

LUKE xii. 47, 48.

And that ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes. For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will aſk the more.

IN proſecution of the argument which I handled in my laſt diſcourſe, namely, that the knowledge of our duty, without the practice of it, will not bring us to happineſs, I ſhall proceed to ſhew, that if our practice be not anſwerable to our knowledge, this will be a great aggravation both of our ſin and puniſhment.

And to this purpoſe, I have pitched upon theſe words of our Lord, which are the application of two parables, which he had deliver'd before, to ſtir up men to a diligent and careful practice of their duty, that ſo they may be in a continual readineſs and preparation for the coming of their Lord. The firſt parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are repreſented as ſo many ſervants in a great family, from which the Lord is abſent, and they being uncertain of the time of his return, ſhould always be in a condition and poſture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, *Peter* enquires of our Saviour, whether he intended this only for his diſciples, or for all? To which queſtion our Saviour returns an anſwer in another parable which more particularly concerned them; who becauſe they were to be the chief rulers and governors of his church, are repreſented by the ſtewards of a great family, *ver.* 42. *Who then is that faithful and wiſe ſteward, whom his Lord ſhall make ruler over his houſhold, to give them their portion of meat in due ſeaſon?* If he diſcharge his duty, *bleſſed is he*; but if he ſhall take occaſion

ſion in his Lord's abſence to domineer over his fellow-ſervants and riotouſly to waſte his Lord's goods, his Lord, when he comes, will puniſh him after a more ſevere and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole, in the words of the text, *And that ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* As if he had ſaid, And well may ſuch a ſervant deſerve ſo ſevere a puniſhment, who having ſuch a truſt committed to him, and knowing his Lord's will ſo much better, yet does contrary to it; upon which our Saviour takes occaſion to compare the fault and puniſhment of thoſe who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with thoſe who are ignorant of it; *That ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes.* And then he adds the reaſon and the equity of this proceeding, *For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will aſk the more.*

The words in general do allude to that law of the Jews, mentioned *Deut.* xxv. 2. where the judge is required to ſee the malefactor puniſh'd according to his fault, by a certain number of ſtripes; in relation to which known law among the Jews, our Saviour here ſays, that *thoſe who knew their Lord's will, and did it not, ſhould be beaten with many ſtripes: but thoſe who knew it not, ſhould be beaten with few ſtripes.* So that there are two obſervations lie plainly before us in the words.

Firſt, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing his duty, if he do it not, the greater will be his condemnation; *the ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.*

Secondly, That ignorance is a great excuſe of mens faults, and will leſſen their puniſhment; *but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes.*

I ſhall begin with the latter of theſe *firſt*, becauſe it will make way for the other; *viz.* That ignorance is a great excuſe of mens faults, and will leſſen their puniſhment; *he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes.*

For the clearing of this, it will be requiſite to conſider what ignorance it is which our Saviour here ſpeaks of; and this is neceſſary to be enquired into, becauſe it is certain that there is ſome ſort of ignorance which doth wholly excuſe and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another ſort, which doth either not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men; ſo that it muſt be a third ſort, different from both theſe, which our Saviour here means.

Firſt, There is an ignorance which doth wholly excuſe and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is *an abſolute and invincible ignorance*, when a perſon is wholly ignorant of the thing, which if he knew, he ſhould be bound to do, but neither can nor could have help'd it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, he either had not the capacity, or wanted the means and opportunity of knowing it. In this caſe a perſon is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For God meaſures the faults of men by their *wills*, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conſcious to himſelf that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do. Now if a man be *ſimply* and *invincibly ignorant* of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether *involuntary*; for the will hath nothing to do, where the underſtanding doth not firſt direct. And this is the caſe of *children* who are not yet come to the uſe of reaſon; for tho' they may do that which is *materially* a fault, yet it is none *in them*, becauſe by reaſon of their incapacity, they are at preſent *invincibly ignorant* of what they ought to do. And this is the caſe likewiſe of *idiots*, who are under a natural incapacity of knowledge, and ſo far as they are ſo, nothing that they do is imputed to them as a fault. The ſame may be ſaid of diſtracted perſons, who are deprived either wholly, or at ſome times, of the uſe of their underſtandings: ſo far, and ſo long as they are thus deprived, they are free from all guilt; and to perſons who have the free and perfect uſe of their reaſon, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are *abſolutely* and *invincibly ignorant*. For inſtance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind, to believe in the Son of God, where he is ſufficiently manifeſted and revealed to them; but thoſe who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, ſhall not be condemn'd for this infidelity, becauſe it is impoſſible they ſhould *believe on him, of whom they never heard*; they may indeed be condemned upon other accounts, for ſinning againſt the light of nature, and for not obeying *the law which was written in their hearts*; for what the Apoſtle ſays of the revelation of the law, is as true of any other revelation of God, *as many as have ſinned without law, ſhall alſo periſh without law; and as many as have ſinned under the law, ſhall be judged by the law*, Rom. ii. 12. In like manner, thoſe who have ſinned without the *Goſpel*, (that is, who never had the knowledge of it) ſhall not be condemned for any offence againſt that revelation which was never made to them, but for their violation of *the law of nature*; only they that have *ſinned under the Goſpel*, ſhall be *judged by it*.

Secondly, There is likewiſe another ſort of ignorance, which either does not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, when men are not only ignorant, but *chuſe to be ſo*; that is, when they wilfully neglect thoſe means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; ſuch as *Job* ſpeaks of, *Job* xxi. 14. *Who ſay unto God, Depart from us, for we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways.* And this ſort of ignorance many among the *Jews* were guilty of, when our Saviour came and preached to them, but they would not be inſtructed by him; *the light came among them, but they loved darkneſs rather than light*, as he himſelf ſays of them; and as he ſays elſewhere of the Phariſees, *they rejected the council of God againſt themſelves*, they wilfully ſhut their eyes againſt that light which offered itſelf to them; *they would not ſee with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor underſtand with their hearts, that they might be converted, and healed.* Now an ignorance in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuſe at all in it. He that knew not his Lord's will, becauſe he would not know it, becauſe he wilfully rejected the means of coming to the knowledge of it, deſerves to be beaten with as many ſtripes, as if he had known it; becauſe he might have known it, and would not. He that will not take notice of the king's proclamation, or will ſtop his ears when it is read, and afterwards offends againſt it, does equally deſerve puniſhment with thoſe who have read it, and heard it, and diſobey it; becauſe he was as groſly faulty in not knowing it; and there is no reaſon that any man's groſs fault ſhould be his excuſe.

So that it is neither of theſe ſorts of ignorance that our Saviour means, neither abſolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is groſly wilful and affected; for the firſt, men deſerve not to be beaten at all, becauſe they cannot help it; for the latter, they deſerve not to be excuſed, becauſe they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our Saviour here ſpeaks of ſuch an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuſe it; for he ſays of them, that *they knew not their Lord's will*, and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuſe them from blame, nor exempt them from puniſhment, *but they ſhould be beaten with few ſtripes*. In the

Third place then, there is an ignorance which is in ſome degree faulty, and yet does in a great meaſure excuſe the faults which proceed from it; and this is when men are not abſolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in compariſon of others, who have a far more clear and diſtinct knowledge of it; and tho' they do not groſly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet perhaps they do not make the beſt uſe they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better; and therefore in compariſon of others, who have far better means and advantages of knowing their Lord's will, they may be ſaid not to know it, tho' they are not ſimply ignorant of it, but only have a more obſcure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance does in a great meaſure excuſe ſuch perſons, and extenuate their crimes, in compariſon of thoſe who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their Maſter's will; and yet it does not free them from all guilt; becauſe they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had; and perhaps if they had uſed more care and induſtry, they might have known their Lord's will better. And this was the caſe of the heathens, who in compariſon of thoſe who enjoyed the light of the Goſpel, might be ſaid not to have known their Lord's will, tho' as to many parts of their duty, they had ſome directions from natural light, and their conſciences did urge them to many things by the obſcure apprehenſions and hopes of a future reward, and the fear of a future puniſhment. But this was but a very obſcure and uncertain *knowledge*, in compariſon of the clear light of the Goſpel, which hath diſcovered to us our duty ſo plainly by the laws and precepts of it, and hath preſented us with ſuch powerful motives and arguments to obedience in the promiſes and threatenings of it. And this likewiſe is the caſe of many Chriſtians; who either through the natural ſlowneſs of their underſtandings, or by the neglect of their parents and teachers, or other circumſtances of their education, have had far leſs means and advantages of knowledge than others. God does not expect ſo much from thoſe, as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity, and advantages of knowledge; and when our Lord ſhall come to call his ſervants to an account, they ſhall be beaten with fewer ſtripes than others; they ſhall not wholly eſcape, becauſe they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had leſs knowledge than others, by ſo much their puniſhment ſhall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it ſhould be ſo, that men ſhould be accountable according to what they have received, and that to whom leſs is given, leſs ſhould be required at their hands. The Scripture hath told us, that *God will judge the world in righteouſneſs*; now juſtice does require, that in taxing the puniſhment of offenders, every thing ſhould be conſider'd, that may be a juſt excuſe and extenuation of their crimes, and that accordingly their puniſhment ſhould be abated. Now the greateſt extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; ſo that ſo far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, ſo far he is excuſable for the neglect of it: for every degree of ignorance takes off ſo much from the perverſeneſs of the will; *& nihil ardet in inferno, niſi propria voluntas*; " Nothing is puniſh'd in hell, but what is voluntary, and proceeds from our wills.

I do not intend this diſcourſe for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is much more deſirable, if we uſe it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault; if we be not wanting to ourſelves, we may be much happier by our knowledge, than any man can be by his ignorance; for tho' ignorance may plead an excuſe, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuſe, than to have the beſt in the world ready at hand to plead for ourſelves. Beſides, that we may do well to conſider, that ignorance is no where an excuſe where it is cheriſh'd; ſo that it would be the vaineſt thing in the world for any man to foſter it, in hopes thereby to excuſe himſelf; for where it is wilful and choſen, it is a fault, and (as I ſaid before) it is the moſt unreaſonable thing in the world, that any man's fault ſhould prove his excuſe. So that this can be no encouragement to ignorance, to ſay that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them, whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is deſigned and choſen, it is wilful; and then no man can reaſonably deſign to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuſe for his faults, becauſe then the ignorance is wilful, and whenever it is ſo, it ceaſeth to be an excuſe.

I the rather ſpeak this, becauſe ignorance hath had the good fortune to meet with great patrons in the world, and to be extoll'd, tho' not upon this account, yet upon another, for which there is leſs pretence of reaſon; as if it were the mother of devotion. Of ſuperſtition I grant it is, and of this we ſee plentiful proof, among thoſe who are ſo careful to preſerve and cheriſh it: but that true piety and devotion ſhould ſpring from it, is as unlikely, as that darkneſs ſhould produce light. I do hope indeed, and charitably believe, that the ignorance in which ſome are detained by their teachers and governors, will be a real excuſe, to as many of them as are otherwiſe honeſt and ſincere; but I doubt not, but the errors and faults which proceed from this ignorance, will lie heavy upon thoſe who keep them in it. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of God, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. *The ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to it, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes. Which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf*; the preparation of our mind to do the will of God, whenever there is occaſion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him; a will rightly diſpoſed to obey God, tho' it be not brought into act for want of opportunity, does not loſe its reward: but when, notwithſtanding we know our Lord's will, there are neither of theſe, neither the act, nor the preparation and reſolution of doing it, what puniſhment may we not expect?

The juſt God, in puniſhing the ſins of men, proportions the puniſhment to the crime, and where the crime is greater, the puniſhment riſeth; as amongſt the Jews, where the crime was ſmall, the malefactor was ſentenced to *a few ſtripes*; where it was great, he was *beaten with many*. Thus our Saviour repreſents the great Judge of the world dealing with ſinners; according as their ſins are aggravated, he will add to their puniſhment. Now after all the aggravations of ſin, there is none that doth more intrinſically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed againſt the clear knowledge of our duty, and that upon theſe *three* accounts:

Firſt, Becauſe the knowledge of God's will is ſo great an advantage to the doing of it.

Secondly, Becauſe it is a great obligation upon us to the doing of it.

Thirdly, Becauſe the neglect of our duty in this caſe, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulneſs and contempt. I ſhall ſpeak briefly to theſe *three*.

Firſt, Becauſe the knowledge of God's will is ſo great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage of doing our duty, is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reaſon which our Saviour adds here in the text, *For to whomſoever much is given, of them much will be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will aſk the more.* It was, no doubt, a great diſcouragement and diſadvantage to the heathens, that they were ſo doubtful concerning the will of God, and in many caſes left to the uncertainty of their own reaſon, by what way and means they might beſt apply themſelves to the pleaſing of him; and this diſcouraged ſeveral of the wiſeſt of them from all ſerious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing, as to be miſtaken about it. Others that were more naturally devout, and could not ſatisfy their conſciences without ſome expreſſions of religion, fell into various ſuperſtitions, and were ready to embrace any way of worſhip which cuſtom preſcribed, or the fancies of men could ſuggeſt to them; and hence ſprang all the ſtupid and barbarous idolatries of the heathen. For ignorance growing upon the world, that natural propenſion which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worſhip of a Deity, for want of certain direction, expreſs'd itſelf in thoſe fooliſh and abominable idolatries, which were practiſed among the heathens.

And is it not then a mighty advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of divine revelation? We have the will of God plainly diſcovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined, ſo that no man that is in any meaſure free from intereſt and prejudice, can eaſily miſtake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of God plainly revealed to us, and ſuch a character of him given, as is moſt ſuitable to our natural conceptions of a Deity, as render him both awful and amiable; for the Scripture repreſents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of ſin, and a great lover of mankind, and we have the law and manner of his worſhip (ſo far as was needful) and the rules of a good life clearly expreſs'd and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience of thoſe laws, a plain diſcovery made to us of the endleſs rewards and puniſhments of another world. And is not this a mighty advantage to the doing of God's will, to have it ſo plainly declared to us, and ſo powerfully enforced upon us? ſo that our duty lies plainly before us; we ſee what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it; ſo that conſidering the Advantage we have of doing God's will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcuſable if we do it not.

Secondly, The knowledge of our Lord's will is likewiſe a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reaſon to oblige us more to do any thing, than to be fully aſſur'd that it is the will of God, and that it is the law of the great ſovereign of the world, who is able to ſave, or to deſtroy? That it is the pleaſure of him that made us, and who hath declared that he deſigns to make us happy, by our obedience to his laws? So that if we know theſe things to be the will of God, we have the greateſt obligation to do them, whether we conſider the authority of God, or our own intereſt; and if we neglect them, we have nothing to ſay in our own excuſe. We knew the law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it; and if after this we will tranſgreſs, there is no apology to be made for us. They have ſomething to plead for themſelves, who can ſay, that though they had ſome apprehenſion of ſome parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do ſome things, yet the different apprehenſions of mankind about ſeveral of theſe things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them eaſy to be carried off from their duty, by the vicious inclinations of their own nature, and the tyranny of cuſtom and example, and the pleaſant temptations of fleſh and blood; but had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from God, and had certainly known theſe things to be his will, this would have conquered and born down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or if it had not, would have ſtopt their mouths, and taken away all excuſe from them. There is ſome colour in this plea, that in many caſes they did not know certainly what the will of God was; but for us who own a clear revelation from God, and profeſs to believe it, what can we ſay for ourſelves, to mitigate the ſeverity of God towards us; why he ſhould not pour forth all his wrath, and execute upon us the fierceneſs of his anger?

Thirdly, The neglect of God's will when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulneſs and contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is ſolely in our wills, and the more wilful any ſin is, the more heinouſly wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than if it proceed from mere obſtinacy and perverſeneſs; and if we know it to be our Lord's will, and do it not, we are guilty of the higheſt contempt of the greateſt authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a ſmall aggravation, to affront the great and ſovereign Judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and deſpiſe them, when we know whoſe laws they are? *Will we provoke the Lord to jealouſy? Are we ſtronger than he?* We believe that it is God who ſaid, *Thou ſhalt not commit adultery*; *thou ſhalt not ſteal*; *thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs againſt thy neighbour*; *thou ſhalt not hate, or oppreſs, or defraud thy brother in any thing*; *but thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*; and will we notwithſtanding venture to break theſe laws, knowing whoſe authority they are ſtampt withal? After this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? What can we ſay for ourſelves, why any one of thoſe many ſtripes which are threaten'd ſhould be abated to us? *Ignoſci aliquatenus ignorantiæ poteſt*; *contemptus veniam non habet*; "Something may be pardoned to ignorance; but contempt can expect no forgiveneſs." He that ſtrikes his Prince not knowing him to be ſo, hath ſomething to ſay for himſelf, that tho' he did a diſloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a diſloyal mind: but he that firſt acknowledgeth him for his Prince, and then affronts him, deſerves to be proſecuted with the utmoſt ſeverity, becauſe he did it wilfully, and in mere contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it is the will of God which we go againſt, takes away all poſſible excuſe from us; for nothing can be ſaid, why we ſhould offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to deſtroy us.

And thus I have as briefly as I could, repreſented to you the true ground and reaſon of the aggravation of thoſe ſins, which are committed againſt the clear knowledge of God's will, and our duty; becauſe this knowledge is ſo great an advantage to the doing of our duty; ſo great an obligation upon us to it; and becauſe the neglect of our Lord's will in this caſe, cannot be without great wilfulneſs, and a downright contempt of his authority.

And ſhall I now need to tell you, how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our Lord's will, and to prepare ourſelves to do according to it; to be always in a readineſs and diſpoſition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occaſion and opportunity? And it concerns us the more, becauſe we, in this age and nation, have ſo many advantages, above a great part of the world, of coming to the knowledge of our duty. We enjoy the cleareſt and moſt perfect revelation which God ever made of his will to mankind, and have the light of divine truth plentifully ſhed amongſt us, by the free uſe of the holy Scriptures, which is not a ſealed book to us, but lies open to be read, and ſtudied by us; this ſpiritual food is *rained down* like Manna *round about our tents*, and every one may gather ſo much as is ſufficient; we are not ſtinted, nor have the word of God given out to us in broken pieces, or mixt and adulterated, here a leſſon of Scripture, and there a legend; but whole and entire, ſincere and uncorrupt.

God hath not left us, as he did the heathens for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light; nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the *Jews*, in dark types and ſhadows: but hath made a clear diſcovery of his mind and will to us. The diſpenſation which we are under, hath no veil upon it, *the darkneſs is paſt, and the true light now ſhineth*; *we are of the day, and of the light*, and therefore it may juſtly be expected that we ſhould *put off the works of darkneſs, and walk as children of the light*. Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the ſins committed againſt it, and when our Lord comes to paſs ſentence upon us, will add to the number of our ſtripes. Nay, if God ſhould inflict no poſitive torment upon ſinners; yet their own minds would deal moſt ſeverely with them upon this account, and nothing will gall their conſciences more, than to remember againſt what light they did offend. For herein lies the very nature and ſting of all guilt, to be conſcious to our ſelves, *that we knew what we ought to have done, and did it not.* The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before, will be pardonable, in compariſon of ours. *The times of that ignorance God winked at; but now he commands all men every where to repent.* Mankind had ſome excuſe for their errors before, and God was pleaſed in a great meaſure to overlook them; but *if we continue ſtill in our ſins, we have no cloak for them.* All the degrees of light which we enjoy, are ſo many talents committed to us by our Lord, for the improving whereof, he will call us to a ſtrict account; *for unto whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required, and to whom he hath committed much, of him he will aſk the more.* And nothing is more reaſonable, than that men ſhould account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of God; and that as their knowledge was increaſed, ſo their ſorrow and puniſhment ſhould proportionably riſe, if they ſin againſt it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deſervedly pitied and lamented by us, but the condemnation of none is ſo bad, as thoſe who having the knowledge of God's will, neglect to do it; *how much better had it been for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!* If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, *we had had no ſin*, in compariſon of what now we have: *but now that we ſee, our ſin remains.* This will aggravate our condemnation beyond meaſure, that we had the knowledge of ſalvation ſo clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us, we know what we ought to do, and *what manner of perſons we ought to be, in all holy converſation and godlineſs.* We believe the coming of our Lord to judgment, and we know not how ſoon he may be *revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels,* not *only to take vengeance on them that know not God,* but on them that have known him, and yet *obey not the Goſpel of his Son.* And if all this will not move us to prepare ourſelves to do our Lord's will, we deſerve to have our ſtripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for thoſe who offend againſt the clear knowledge of God's will, and their duty.

Let us then be perſuaded to ſet upon the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our underſtandings, deſcend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known ſin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty; and *if our hearts condemn us not*, neither for the neglect of the means of knowledge, nor for rebelling againſt the light of God's truth ſhining in our minds, and glaring upon our conſciences, *then have we confidence towards God: but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.*

SERMON LXI.

The Firſt Sermon on this Text.

The Sins of Men not chargeable upon God; but upon themſelves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.

NEXT to the belief of a God, and his Providence, there is nothing more fundamentally neceſſary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of theſe two principles, *That God is not the author of ſin,* and *that every man's ſin lies at his own door, and he hath reaſon to blame himſelf for all the evil that he does.*

Firſt, That *God is not the author of ſin*, that he is no way acceſſary to our faults, either by tempting or forcing us to the commiſſion of them. For if he were, they would neither properly be *ſins*, nor could they be juſtly puniſhed. They would not properly be *ſins*, for *ſin* is a contradiction to the will of God; but ſuppoſing men to be either tempted or neceſſitated thereto, that which we call *ſin*, would either be a meer paſſive obedience to the will of God, or an active compliance with it, but neither way a contradiction to it. Nor could theſe actions be juſtly puniſhed; for all puniſhment ſuppoſeth a fault, and a fault ſuppoſeth liberty and freedom from force and neceſſity; ſo that no man can be juſtly puniſhed for that which he cannot help, and no man can help that, which he is neceſſitated and compell'd to. And tho' there were no force in the caſe, but only temptation, yet it would be unreaſonable for the ſame perſon to tempt and puniſh. For as nothing is more contrary to the holineſs of God, than to tempt men to ſin; ſo nothing can be more againſt juſtice and goodneſs, than firſt to draw men into a fault, and then to chaſtiſe them for it. So that this is a principle which lies at the bottom of all religion, *That God is not the author of the ſins of men*. And then,

Secondly, *That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he has reaſon enough to blame himſelf for all the evil that he does.* And this is that which makes men properly *guilty*, that when they have done amiſs, they are conſcious to themſelves it was their own act, and they might have done otherwiſe; and *guilt* is that which makes men liable to puniſhment; and fear of puniſhment is the great reſtraint from ſin, and one of the principal arguments for virtue and obedience.

And both theſe principles our Apoſtle St. *James* does here fully aſſert in the words which I have read unto you. *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.*

In which words theſe *two* things are plainly contained.

Firſt, That God doth not tempt any man to ſin. *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

Secondly, That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he is his own greateſt tempter. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.*

I. That God doth not tempt any man to ſin. *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* In which words there are *three* things to be conſidered.

Firſt, The propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, and that is, *That God tempts men. Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.*

Secondly, The manner in which he rejects it. *Let no man ſay ſo.* By which manner of ſpeaking, the Apoſtle inſinuates theſe *two* things. 1. That men are apt to lay their faults upon God: For when he ſays, *Let no man ſay ſo*, he intimates, that men are apt to *ſay* ſo, and it is very probable that ſome *did ſay* ſo; and 2*dly*, That it is not only a fault, but an impious aſſertion to ſay that God tempts men. He ſpeaks of it as a thing to be rejected with deteſtation. *Let no man ſay*; that is, far be it from us to affirm a thing ſo impious and diſhonourable to God.

Thirdly, The reaſon and argument that he brings againſt it, *For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

Firſt, The propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, and that is, *That God tempts men: Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* Now that we may the more diſtinctly underſtand the meaning of the propoſition, which the Apoſtle here rejects, it will be very requiſite to conſider what *temptation* is, and the ſeveral ſorts and kinds of it. To *tempt* a man, is, in general, nothing elſe but to make trial of him in any kind what he will do. In Scripture, temptation is commonly confin'd to the trial of a man's good or bad, of his virtuous or vicious inclinations. But then it is ſuch a trial as endangers a man's virtue; and if he be not well reſolved, is likely to overcome it, and to make him fall into ſin. So that temptation does always imply ſomething of danger the worſt way. And men are thus tempted, either from themſelves, or by others; by others chiefly theſe *two* ways:

Firſt, By direct and downright perſuaſions to ſin.

Secondly, By being brought into ſuch circumſtances as will greatly endanger their falling into it, tho' none ſollicit and perſuade them to it.

Firſt, By direct and downright perſuaſions to ſin. Thus the Devil tempted our firſt parents, by repreſenting things ſo to them, as might on the one hand incite them to ſin, and on the other hand weaken and looſen that which was the great curb and reſtraint from it. On the one hand he repreſents to them the advantages they ſhould have by breaking God's command. *God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes ſhall be opened, and ye ſhall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.* On the other hand, he repreſents the danger of offending not to be ſo great and certain as they imagined. *The Serpent ſaid unto the woman, Ye ſhall not ſurely die.* And the Devil had ſo good ſucceſs in this way of tempting the firſt *Adam*, as to encourage him to ſet upon the ſecond, our bleſſed Saviour, in the ſame manner; for he would have perſuaded him *to fall down and worſhip him*, by offering him *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.* And thus bad men many times tempt others, and endeavour to draw them into the ſame wicked courſes with themſelves. *Solomon* repreſents to us the manner and the danger of it, *Prov.* i. 10, 11, 13, 14. *My ſon, if ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not; if they ſay, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cauſe; we ſhall find all precious ſubſtance, we ſhall fill our houſes with ſpoil. Caſt in thy lot amongſt us, let us all have one purſe.* This is the firſt way of temptation.

And to be ſure God tempts no man this way. He offers no arguments to man to perſuade him to ſin; he no where propoſeth either reward or impunity to ſinners; but on the contrary gives all imaginable encouragement to obedience, and threatens the tranſgreſſion of his law with moſt dreadful puniſhments.

Secondly, Men are likewiſe tempted, by being brought into ſuch circumſtances, as will greatly endanger their falling into ſin, tho' none perſuade them to it; and this happens two ways; when men are remarkably beſet with the allurements of the world, or aſſaulted with the evils and calamities of it; for either of theſe conditions are great temptations to men, and make powerful aſſaults upon them, eſpecially when they fall upon thoſe who are ill diſpoſed before, or are but of a weak virtue and reſolution.

The allurements of the world are ſtrong temptations; riches, honours, and pleaſures, are the occaſions and incentives to many luſts. Honour and greatneſs, power and authority over others, eſpecially when men are ſuddenly lifted up, and from a low condition, are apt to tranſport men to pride and inſolency towards others. Power is a ſtrong liquor which does eaſily intoxicate weak minds, and make them apt to ſay and do indecent things. *Man that is in honour and underſtands not, is like the beaſts that periſh*; intimating that men who are exalted to an high condition, are very apt to forget themſelves, and to play the fools and beaſts. It requires great conſideration, and a well poiſed mind, not to be lifted up with one's condition. Weak heads are apt to turn and grow dizzy, when they look down from a great height.

And ſo likewiſe eaſe and proſperity are a very ſlippery condition to moſt men, and without great care do endanger the falling into great ſins. So *Solomon* obſerves, *Prov.* i. 32. *For the turning away of the ſimple ſhall ſlay them, and the proſperity of fools ſhall deſtroy them.* For this reaſon *Agur* maketh his prayer to God, that he would *give him neither poverty nor riches*, but keep him in a mean condition, becauſe of the danger of both extremes, *Prov.* xxx. 8, 9. *Give me not riches, leſt I be full, and deny thee.* Both the eager deſire and the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of riches do frequently prove fatal to men. So our Saviour tells us elſewhere very emphatically, *Matth.* xix. 23, 24. *Verily I ſay unto you, that a rich man ſhall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven: And again I ſay unto you, it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* St. *Paul* likewiſe very fully declares unto us the great danger of this condition, 1 *Tim.* vi. 9, 10. *But they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while ſome coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows.*

But the greateſt bait of all to fleſh and blood, is ſenſual pleaſures; the very preſence and opportunity of theſe, are apt to kindle the deſires, and to enflame the luſts of men, eſpecially where theſe temptations meet with ſuitable tempers, where every ſpark that falls catcheth.

And on the other hand, the evils and calamities of this world, eſpecially if they threaten or fall upon men in any degree of extremity, are ſtrong temptations to human nature. Poverty and want, pain and ſuffering, and the fear of any great evil, eſpecially of death, theſe are great ſtraits to human nature, and apt to tempt men to great ſins, to impatience and diſcontent, to unjuſt and diſhoneſt ſhifts, to the forſaking of God, and apoſtaſy from his truth and religion. *Agur* was ſenſible of the dangerous temptation of poverty, and therefore he prays againſt *that*, as well as againſt riches; *give me not poverty, leſt being poor I ſteal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain*; that is, leſt I be tempted to theft, and perjury. The Devil, whoſe trade it is to tempt men to ſin, knew very well the force of theſe ſorts of temptations, when he deſires God firſt to touch *Job* in his eſtate, and to ſee what effect that would have, *Job* i. 11. *But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curſe thee to thy face.* And when he found himſelf deceived in this, ſurely he thought, that were he but afflicted with great bodily pains, that would put him out of all patience, and fleſh and blood would not be able to withſtand this temptation, *Chap.* ii. 5. *But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his fleſh, and he will curſe thee to thy face.* And this was the great temptation that the primitive Chriſtians were aſſaulted withal; they were tempted to forſake Chriſt and his religion, by a moſt violent perſecution, by the ſpoiling of their goods, by impriſoment, and torture, and death. And this is that kind of temptation which the Apoſtle particularly ſpeaks of before the text, *Bleſſed is the man that endureth temptation*; *for when he is tried, he ſhall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promiſed to them that love him*; and then it follows, *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* And thus I have given an account of the ſeveral ſorts of temptations comprehended under this *ſecond* head, namely, when men are tempted by being brought into ſuch circumſtances as do greatly endanger their falling into ſin, by the allurements of this world, and by the evils and calamities of it.

Now the queſtion is, how far God hath an hand in theſe kind of temptations, that ſo we may know how to limit this propoſition, which the Apoſtle here rejects, *that men are tempted of God. Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.*

That the providence of God does order, or at leaſt permit men to be brought into theſe circumſtances I have ſpoken of, which are ſuch dangerous temptations to ſin, no man can doubt, that believes his providence to be concern'd in the affairs of the world. All the difficulty is, how far the Apoſtle does here intend to exempt God from an hand in theſe temptations. Now for the clearer underſtanding of this, it will be requiſite to conſider the ſeveral ends and reaſons, which thoſe who tempt others may have in tempting them; and all temptation is for one of theſe *three* ends or reaſons; either for the trial and improvement of mens virtues; or by way of judgment and puniſhment for ſome former great ſins and provocations; or with a direct purpoſe and deſign to ſeduce men to ſin; theſe I think are the chief ends and reaſons that can be imagined, of exerciſing men with dangerous temptations.

Firſt, For the exerciſe and improvement of mens graces and virtues. And this is the end which God always aims at, in bringing good men, or permitting them to be brought into dangerous temptations. And therefore St. *James* ſpeaks of it as a matter of joy, when good men are exerciſed with afflictions; not becauſe afflictions are deſirable for themſelves, but becauſe of the happy conſequences of them, *ver.* 2, 3. of this Chapter, *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*; *knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.* And to the ſame purpoſe St. *Paul*, Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. *We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience*; δοκιμὴν· patience trieth *a* man, *and* this *trial worketh hope, and hope maketh not aſhamed.* Theſe are happy effects and conſequences of affliction and ſuffering, when they improve the virtues of men and increaſe their graces, and thereby make way for the increaſe of their glory. Upon this account St. *James* pronounceth thoſe *bleſſed*, who are *thus tempted. Bleſſed is the man that endureth temptation*; *for when he is tried, he ſhall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promiſed to them that love him.*

And this certainly is no diſparagement to the providence of God, to permit men to be thus tempted, when he permits it for no other end, but to make them better men, and thereby to prepare them for a greater reward: And ſo the Apoſtle aſſures us, *Rom.* viii. 17, 18. *If ſo be we ſuffer with him, we ſhall alſo be glorified with him*; *for I reckon* *that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us.* And *ver.* 28. *For we know that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love God.* And this happy end and iſſue of temptations to good men the providence of God ſecures to them (if they be not wanting to themſelves) one of theſe two ways, either by proportioning the temptation to their ſtrength; or if it exceed *that*, by miniſtring new ſtrength and ſupport to them, by the ſecret and extraordinary aids of his holy Spirit.

Firſt, By proportioning the temptation to their ſtrength; ordering things ſo by his ſecret and wiſe Providence, that they ſhall not be aſſaulted by any temptation, which is beyond their ſtrength to reſiſt and overcome. And herein the ſecurity of good men doth ordinarily conſiſt; and the very beſt of us, thoſe who have the firmeſt and moſt reſolute virtue, were in infinite danger, if the providence of God did not take this care of us. For a temptation may ſet upon the beſt men with ſo much violence, or ſurprize them at ſuch an advantage, as no ordinary degree of grace and virtue is able to withſtand: But where men are ſincerely good, and honeſtly reſolv'd, the providence of God doth ward off theſe fierce blows, and put by theſe violent thruſts, and by a ſecret diſpoſal of things, keep them from being aſſaulted by theſe irreſiſtible kinds of temptations.

The conſideration whereof, as it is a great encouragement to men to be ſincerely good, ſo likewiſe a great argument for a continual dependance upon the providence of God, and to take us off from confidence in ourſelves, and our own ſtrength. And this uſe the Apoſtle makes of it, 1 *Cor*, x. 12. *Wherefore let him that thinketh he ſtandeth*, (that is confident that nothing ſhall be able to ſhake him, or throw him down) *take heed leſt he fall*; *there hath no temptation taken you, but ſuch as is common to men*; εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος, *but what is human*; nothing but what an human ſtrength, aſſiſted by an ordinary grace of God, may be able to reſiſt and conquer. But there are greater and more violent temptations than theſe, which you have not yet been tried with; and when thoſe happen, we muſt have recourſe to God for an extraordinary aſſiſtance. And this is the

Second way I mentioned, whereby the providence of God does ſecure good men in caſe of extraordinary temptations, which no human ſtrength can probably reſiſt. And this the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us of in the very next words, *God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that you may be able to bear it.* That is, in caſe of great and violent temptations (ſuch as the Chriſtians in the height of their perſecutions were expoſed to) God will ſecretly miniſter ſtrength and ſupport equal to the force and power of the temptation. And this God did in an extraordinary manner to the chriſtian martyrs, and that to ſuch a degree, as made them joyfully to embrace their ſufferings, and with the greateſt chearfulneſs in the world to endure thoſe torments, which no human patience was able to bear. And where God doth thus ſecure men againſt temptations, or ſupport them under them, it is no reflection at all upon the goodneſs or juſtice of his providence, to permit them to be thus tempted.

Secondly, God permits others to be thus tempted, by way of judgment and puniſhment for ſome former great ſins and provocations which they have been guilty of. And thus many times God puniſheth great and notorious offenders, by permitting them to fall into great temptations, which meeting with a vicious diſpoſition, are likely to be too hard for them, eſpecially conſidering how by a long habit of wickedneſs, and wilful commiſſion of great and notorious ſins, they have made themſelves an eaſy prey to every temptation, and have driven the Spirit of God from them, and deprived themſelves of thoſe aids and reſtraints of his grace, which he ordinarily affords, not only to good men, but likewiſe to thoſe who are not very bad. And thus God is ſaid to have *harden'd Pharaoh* by thoſe plagues and judgments which he ſent upon him and his kingdom. But if we carefully read the ſtory, it is ſaid that *he firſt harden'd himſelf*, and then that *God harden'd him*; that is, he being harden'd under the firſt judgments of God, God ſent more, which meeting with his obſtinacy, had this natural effect upon him, to harden him yet more; not that God did infuſe any wickedneſs or obſtinacy into him, but by his juſt judgments ſent more plagues upon him, which harden'd him yet more, and which were likely to have that effect upon him, conſidering the ill temper of the man. And it was juſt by way of puniſhment that they ſhould. And ſo likewiſe, *Joſhua* xi. 19, 20. it is ſaid that the cities of the *Canaanites* did not make peace with *Joſhua*, becauſe *it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they ſhould come againſt Iſrael in* *battel, that he might deſtroy them utterly*; that is, for their former iniquities, the meaſure whereof was now full, the providence of God did juſtly bring them into, and leave them under thoſe circumſtances, which made them obſtinate againſt all terms of peace, and this proved fatal to them.

And in the like ſenſe we are to underſtand ſeveral other expreſſions in ſcripture, which likewiſe might ſeem very harſh. As *Iſaiah* vi. 10. *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes, leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their hearts, and convert and be healed*; all which expreſſions ſignify no more, but that God, for the former provocations and impenitency of that people, did leave them to their own hardneſs and blindneſs, ſo that they did not deſire to underſtand and make uſe of the means of their recovery. So likewiſe, *Rom.* i. 24. God is ſaid to have *given up* the idolatrous Heathen *to uncleanneſs, to vile and unnatural luſts*; and ver. 28. *to a reprobate and injudicious mind*; that is, as a puniſhment of their idolatry, he left them to the power of thoſe temptations, which betrayed them to the vileſt luſts. And to mention but one text more, 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 11. the Apoſtle threatens thoſe that rejected the truth, that *for this cauſe God would ſend them ſtrong deluſions* (the efficacy of error) *that they ſhould believe a lye, and that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs*; that is, as a juſt puniſhment for their renouncing the truth, God gave them over to the power of deluſion; their error had its full ſcope at them, to tempt them with all its colours and pretences.

But it is obſervable, that, in all theſe places which I have mention'd, God is ſaid to give men up to the power of temptation, as a puniſhment of ſome former great crimes and provocations. And it is not unjuſt with God thus to deal with men, to leave them to the power of temptation, when they had firſt wilfully forſaken him; and in this caſe God doth not tempt men to ſin, but leaves them to themſelves, to be tempted by their own hearts luſts; and if they yield and are conquered, it is their own fault, becauſe they have neglected God's grace, whereby they might have been able to have reſiſted thoſe temptations; and have forced his holy Spirit to withdraw himſelf from them, and to leave them open and naked to thoſe aſſaults of temptation, againſt which they might otherwiſe have been ſufficiently armed.

Thirdly, The laſt end of temptation which I mentioned, is to try men, with a direct purpoſe and intention to ſeduce men to ſin. Thus wicked men tempt others, and thus the Devil tempts men. Thus he tempted our firſt parents, and ſeduced them from their obedience and allegiance to God. Thus he tempted *Job* by bringing him into thoſe circumſtances, which were very likely to have forc'd him into impatience and diſcontent. And thus he tempted our bleſſed Saviour; but *found nothing in him* to work upon, or to give him any advantage over him. And thus he daily tempts men, by laying all ſorts of baits and ſnares before them, *going about continually, ſeeking whom he may* ſeduce and deſtroy; and as far as God permits him, and his power reacheth, he ſuits his temptations as near as he can to the humours and appetites and inclinations of men, contriving them into ſuch circumſtances, as that he may ply his temptations upon them to the greateſt advantage; propounding ſuch objects to them, as may moſt probably draw forth the corruptions of men, and kindle their irregular deſires, and inflame their luſts, and tempt their evil inclinations that way, which they are moſt ſtrongly bent. He tempts the covetous man with gain, the ambitious man with preferment, the voluptuous man with carnal and ſenſual pleaſures; and where none of theſe baits will take, he ſtirs up his inſtruments to perſecute thoſe who are ſtedfaſt and confirmed in reſolutions of piety and virtue, to try if he can work upon their fear, and ſhake their conſtancy and fidelity to God and goodneſs that way; and all this he doth with a direct deſign and earneſt deſire to ſeduce men from their duty, and to betray them to ſin.

But thus *God tempts no man*, and in this ſenſe it is that the Apoſtle means that *no man when he is tempted, is tempted of God*. God hath no deſign to ſeduce any man to ſin. He often proves the obedience of men, and ſuffers them to *fall into divers temptations*, for *the trial of their faith*, and exerciſe of their obedience and other virtues; and he permits bad men to be aſſaulted with great temptations, and as a puniſhment of their former obſtinacy and impiety, withdraws the aids and aſſiſtances of his grace from them, and leaves them to their own weakneſs and folly; but not ſo as to take away all reſtraint of his grace even from bad men, unleſs it be upon very high provocation, and a long and obſtinate continuance in ſin; But God never tempts any man, with any intention

tion to ſeduce him to ſin, and with a deſire he ſhould do wickedly. This is the proper work of the Devil and his inſtruments; in this ſenſe it is far from *God to tempt any man*; and whenever in the ordinary courſe, and by the common permiſſion of his providence, men *fall into temptation*, the utmoſt that God does, is *to leave them to themſelves*; and he does not do this neither, but to thoſe who have highly provoked him to depart from them, that is, to thoſe who have juſtly deſerved to be ſo dealt withal.

And thus I have conſider'd the propoſition which the Apoſtle here rejects, namely, *that God tempts men*, and have ſhewn as clearly as I can, how it is to be limited and underſtood. I now proceed to the *ſecond* thing which I propounded to conſider, *viz.* The manner in which the Apoſtle rejects this propoſition, *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* By which manner of ſpeaking, he inſinuates *two* things.

Firſt, That men are apt to lay their faults upon God. For when he ſays, *Let no man ſay ſo*, he intimates that men were apt *to ſay* thus; and 'tis probable ſome *did ſay ſo*, to excuſe themſelves for their deſerting their religion upon the temptation of perſecution and ſuffering. 'Tis not unlikely that men might lay the fault upon God's Providence, which expoſed them to theſe difficult trials, and thereby tempted them to forſake their religion.

But however this be, we find it very natural to men, to transfer their faults upon others. Men are naturally ſenſible when they offend, and do contrary to their duty; and the guilt of ſin is an heavy burthen, of which men would be glad to eaſe themſelves as much as they can; and they think it is a mitigation and excuſe of their faults if they did not proceed only from themſelves, but from the violence and compulſion, the temptation and inſtigation of others. But eſpecially men are very glad to lay their faults upon God, becauſe he is a full and ſufficient excuſe, nothing being to be blamed that comes from him. Thus *Adam* did, upon the commiſſion of the very firſt ſin that mankind was guilty of. When God charged him for breaking of his law, by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, he endeavours to excuſe himſelf by laying the fault obliquely upon God; *The woman whom thou gaveſt to be with me, ſhe gave me of the tree, and I did eat. The woman whom thou gaveſt to be with me*; he does what he can to derive the fault upon God. And tho' this be very unreaſonable, yet it ſeems it is very natural. Men would fain have the pleaſure of committing ſin, but then they would be glad to remove as much of the trouble and guilt of it from themſelves as they can.

Secondly, This manner of ſpeech, which the Apoſtle here uſeth, doth inſinuate further to us, that it is not only a falſe, but an impious aſſertion to ſay that God tempts men to ſin. He ſpeaks of it, not only as a thing unfit to be ſaid, but fit to be rejected with the greateſt indignation; *let no man ſay*, that is, far be it from us to affirm any thing ſo impious and ſo diſhonourable to God. For nothing can be more contrary to the holy and righteous nature of God, and to thoſe plain declarations which he hath made of himſelf, than to ſeduce men to wickedneſs, and therefore no man, that hath any regard to the honour of God, can entertain the leaſt ſuſpicion of his having any hand in the ſins of men, or give heed to any principles or doctrines, from whence ſo odious and obominable a conſequence may be drawn. I proceed to the

Third thing I propounded to conſider, *viz.* The reaſon or argument which the Apoſtle brings againſt this impious ſuggeſtion; *That God cannot be tempted with evil*, and therefore no man can imagine that he ſhould *tempt any man* to it; *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* And in ſpeaking to this, I ſhall

Firſt, Conſider the ſtrength and force of this argument; And

Secondly, The nature and kind of it.

Firſt, The ſtrength and force of this argument, *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*; ἀπείραστός ἐστι κακῶν; *he is untemptible by evil*; he cannot be drawn to any thing that is bad himſelf, and therefore it cannot be imagined he ſhould have any inclination or deſign to ſeduce others. And this will appear to be a ſtrong and forcible argument, if we conſider,

Firſt, The propoſition upon which it is grounded, *that God cannot be tempted by evil.*

Secondly, The conſequence that clearly follows from it; and that is, that becauſe God cannot be tempted by evil, therefore *he cannot tempt any man to it.*

Firſt, We will conſider the propoſition upon which this argument is built, and that is, *that God cannot be tempted by evil.* He is out of the reach of any temptation to evil. Whoever is tempted to any thing, is either tempted by his own inclination, or by the allurement of the object, or by ſome external motive and conſideration: but none of all theſe can be imagined to have any place in God, to tempt him to evil.

For, *Firſt*, he hath no temptation to it from his own inclination. The holy and pure nature of God is at the greateſt diſtance from evil, and at the greateſt contrariety to it. He is ſo far from having any inclination to evil, that it is the only thing in the world to which he hath an irreconcilable antipathy. This the Scripture frequently declares to us, and that in a very emphatical manner, *Pſal.* v. 4. *He is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him.* The words are *a diminution*, and leſs is ſaid than is intended by them; the meaning is, that God is ſo far from taking pleaſure in ſin, that he hath a perfect hatred and abhorrence of it, *Hab.* i. 13. *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canſt not look upon iniquity.* As when men hate a thing to the higheſt degree, they turn away their eyes, and cannot endure to look upon it. Light and darkneſs are not more oppoſite to one another, than the holy nature of God is to ſin. *What fellowſhip hath light with darkneſs, or God with Belial?*

Secondly, There is no allurement in the object, to ſtir up any inclination in him towards it. Sin in its very nature is imperfection, and irregularity, crookedneſs, and deformity; ſo that unleſs there be an inclination to it before-hand, there is nothing in it to move any one's liking or deſire towards it; it hath no attractives or enticements in it, but to a corrupt and ill-diſpoſed mind.

Thirdly, Neither are there external motives and conſiderations, that can be imagined to tempt God to it. All arguments that have any temptation, are either founded in hope or fear; either in the hope of gaining ſome benefit or advantage, or in the fear of falling into ſome miſchief or inconvenience. Now the divine Nature being perfectly happy, and perfectly ſecured in its own happineſs, is out of the reach of any of theſe temptations. Men are many times tempted to evil very ſtrongly by theſe conſiderations; they want many things to make them happy, and they fear many things which may make them miſerable; and the hopes of the one and the fears of the other, are apt to work very powerfully upon them, to ſeduce them from their duty, and to draw them to ſin: but the divine Nature is firm againſt all theſe attempts, by its own fulneſs and ſecurity. So that you ſee now the propoſition, upon which the Apoſtle grounds his argument, is evidently true, and beyond all exception, *that God cannot be tempted with evil.* Let us then in the

Second place, conſider the conſequence that clearly follows from it, That becauſe God cannot be tempted with evil, *therefore he cannot tempt any man to it.* For why ſhould he deſire to draw men into that, which he himſelf abhors, and which is ſo contrary to his own nature and diſpoſition? When men tempt one another to ſin, they do it to make others like themſelves; and when the Devil tempts men to ſin, it it either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. But none of theſe conſiderations can have any place in God, or be any motive to him to tempt men to ſin.

Bad men tempt others to ſin, to make them like themſelves, and that with one of theſe *two* deſigns; either for the comfort or pleaſure of company, or for the countenance of it, that there may be ſome kind of apology and excuſe for them.

For the comfort and pleaſure of company. Man does not love to be alone; and for this reaſon bad men endeavour to make others like themſelves, that agreeing with them in the ſame diſpoſition and manners, they may be fit company for them. For no man takes pleaſure in the ſociety and converſation of thoſe, who are of contrary tempers and inclinations to them, becauſe they are continually warring and claſhing with one another. And for this reaſon bad men hate and perſecute thoſe that are good. *Let us lie in wait* (ſay they) *for the righteous, becauſe he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings*; *he is grievous unto us even to behold*; *for his life is not like other mens*; *and his ways are of another faſhion*; as it is expreſs'd in the wiſdom of *Solomon.* So that wicked men tempt others to ſin, that they may have the pleaſure and contentment of their ſociety. But now for this reaſon God cannot be imagined to tempt men to ſin, becauſe that would be the way to make them unlike himſelf, and ſuch as his ſoul could take no pleaſure in.

Another deſign that bad men have in ſeducing others to ſin, is thereby to give countenance to their bad actions, and to be ſome kind of excuſe and apology for them. Among men, the multitude of offenders does ſometimes procure impunity, but it always gives countenance to vice; and men are apt to alledge it in their excuſe, that they are not alone guilty of ſuch a fault, that they did not do it without company and example; which is the reaſon of that law, *Exod.* xxiii. 2. *Thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil*; implying, that men are very apt to take encouragement to any thing that is bad, from company and example. But neither hath this reaſon any place in God, who being far from doing evil himſelf, can have no reaſon to tempt others to do ſo, by way of excuſe and vindication of himſelf.

And when the Devil tempts men to ſin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. Out of malice to God, to ſpoil his workmanſhip, and to pervert that which came innocent and upright out of his hands; to rob God of his Subjects, and to debauch them from their duty and allegiance to him; to ſtrengthen the rebellion which he has raiſed againſt God, and to make him as many enemies as he can. But for this end God cannot tempt any man; for this would be to procure diſhonour to himſelf, and to deface the work of his own hands.

Another reaſon why the Devil tempts men, is envy. When he was fallen from God, and happineſs, and by his own rebellion had made himſelf miſerable, he was diſcontented to ſee the happy condition of man, and *it grieved him at his very heart*; and this moved him to tempt man to ſin, that he might involve him in the ſame miſery into which he had plunged himſelf. It is a pleaſure to envy to overturn the happineſs of others, and to lay them level with themſelves. But the Divine Nature is full of goodneſs, and delights in the happineſs of all his creatures. His own incomparable felicity has placed him as much above any temptation to envying others, as above any occaſion of being contemned by them. He grudges no man's happineſs, and therefore cannot tempt men to ſin, out of a deſire to ſee them miſerable. So that none of thoſe conſiderations which move the Devil to tempt men to ſin, and evil men to tempt one another to do wickedly, can be imagined to have any place in God.

And thus you ſee the force of the Apoſtle's argument, that becauſe *God cannot be tempted to evil*, therefore *he can tempt no man*. None tempt others to be bad, but thoſe who are firſt ſo themſelves. I ſhall now in the

Second place, Conſider the nature and kind of the argument, which the Apoſtle here uſeth, *Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God*; *for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* He does not reject this impious propoſition barely upon his own authority; but he argues againſt it from the nature and perfection of God; and therein appeals to the common notions of mankind concerning God. We might very well have reſted in his authority, being an Apoſtle commiſſioned by our Saviour, and extraordinarily aſſiſted and witneſſed to, by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, wherewith he was endowed. But he condeſcends to give a reaſon of what he ſays, and appeals to the common principles of mankind. For all men will readily agree to this, *that God hath all imaginable perfection:* but it is a plain imperfection to be liable to be tempted to evil, and therefore *God cannot be tempted to evil.* And if ſo, it is as impoſſible *that he ſhould tempt others to it*; for none can have either an inclination or intereſt to ſeduce others to evil, but thoſe who have been firſt ſeduced to it themſelves.

Now in this method of arguing, the Apoſtle teacheth us one of the ſureſt ways of reaſoning in religion; namely, from the *natural Notions which men have of God.* So that all doctrines plainly contrary to thoſe natural notions which men have of God, are to be rejected, what authority ſoever they pretend to; whatever plainly derogates from the goodneſs or juſtice of God, or any other of his perfections, is certainly falſe, what authority ſoever it may claim from the judgment of learned and pious men; yea tho' it pretend to be countenanc'd from the texts and expreſſions of holy Scripture. Becauſe nothing can be entertain'd as a divine revelation, which plainly contradicts the common natural notions which mankind have of God. For all reaſoning about divine Revelation, and whether that which pretends to be ſo, be really ſo or not, is to be govern'd by thoſe natural notions. And if any thing that pretends to be a revelation from God, ſhould teach men that there is no God, or that he is not wiſe, and good, and juſt, and powerful; this is reaſon enough to reject it, how confident ſoever the pretence be, that it is a divine Revelation.

And if any thing be, upon good grounds in reaſon, received for a divine revelation, (as the holy Scriptures are amongſt Chriſtians) no man ought to he regarded, who from thence pretends to maintain any doctrine contrary to the natural notions, which men have of God; ſuch as clearly contradict his holineſs, or goodneſs, or juſtice, or do by plain and undeniable conſequence make God the author of Sin, or the like; becauſe the very attempt to prove any ſuch thing out of Scripture, does ſtrike at the divine authority of thoſe books. For if they be from God, it is certain they can contain no ſuch thing. So that no man ought to ſuffer himſelf to be ſeduced into any ſuch opinions, upon pretence that there are expreſſions in Scripture, which ſeem to countenance them. For if they really did ſo, the conſequence would not be the confirming of ſuch opinions; but the weakening of the authority of the Scripture it ſelf. For juſt ſo many arguments as any Man can draw from Scripture for any ſuch opinion, ſo many weapons he puts into the hands of Atheiſts againſt the Scripture it ſelf.

I do not ſpeak this, as if I thought there were any ground from Scripture for any ſuch doctrine, I am very certain there is not. And if there be any particular expreſſions, which to prejudic'd men may ſeem to import any ſuch thing, every man ought to govern himſelf in the interpretation of ſuch paſſages, by what is clear and plain, and agreeable to the main ſcope and tenor of the Bible, and to thoſe natural notions which men have of God, and of his perfections. For when all is done, this is one of the ſureſt ways of reaſoning in religion; and whoever guides himſelf, and ſteers by this compaſs, can never err much: but whoever ſuffers himſelf to be led away by the appearance of ſome more obſcure phraſes in the expreſſions of Scripture, and the gloſſes of men upon them, without regard to this rule, may run into the greateſt deluſions, may wander eternally, and loſe himſelf in one miſtake after another, and ſhall never find his way out of this endleſs *labyrinth*, but by *this clue*.

If St. *James* had not been an Apoſtle, the argument which he uſeth would have convinced any reaſonable man, *that God tempts no man to ſin*, becauſe *he cannot be tempted with evil himſelf*, and therefore it is unreaſonable to imagine *he ſhould tempt any man*. For he argues from ſuch a principle, as all mankind will, at firſt hearing, aſſent to.

And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing aſſerted by the Apoſtle here in the text; *That God tempts no man to ſin, Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man.* Before I proceed to the *ſecond* aſſertion, *that every man is his own greateſt tempter*, I ſhould draw ſome uſeful inferences from what has been already delivered: but I reſerve both the one and the other to the next opportunity.

SERMON LXII.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

The Sins of Men not chargeable upon God; but upon themſelves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed.

WHEN I made entrance upon theſe words, I told you, that next to the Belief of a *God*, and a *Providence*, nothing is more fundamentally neceſſary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of theſe *two* principles; *that God is not the author of the ſins of men*; and *that every man's fault lies at his own door.* And both theſe principles St. *James* does clearly and fully aſſert in theſe words.

Firſt, God tempts no man to ſin.

Secondly, Every man is his own greateſt tempter.

The *firſt* of theſe I have largely ſpoken to in my former diſcourſe; and from what I then ſaid, I ſhall only draw a few uſeful inferences, before I proceed to the *ſecond*, *viz.* Theſe which follow.

Firſt, Let us beware of all ſuch doctrines, as do any ways tend to make God the author of ſin; either by laying a neceſſity upon men of ſinning, or by laying ſecret deſigns to tempt and ſeduce men to ſin. Nothing can be farther from the nature of God, than to do any ſuch thing, and nothing can be more diſhonourable to him, than to imagine any ſuch thing of him; *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil*; and can we think, that he who cannot endure to ſee it, ſhould have any hand in it? We find that the holy men in Scripture are very careful to remove all thought and ſuſpicion of this from God. *Elihu*, *Job* xxxvi. 3. before he would argue about God's providence with *Job*, he reſolves in the firſt place, to attribute nothing to God, that is unworthy of him. *I will* (ſays he) *aſcribe righteouſneſs to my maker.* So likewiſe St. *Paul*, *Rom.* vii. 7. *What ſhall we ſay then? Is the law ſin? God forbid. Is the law ſin?* that is, hath God given men a law to this end, that he might draw them into ſin? far be it from him. *Gal.* ii. 17. *Is Chriſt the miniſter of ſin? God forbid.*

You ſee then how tender good men have always been of aſcribing any thing to God, that might ſeem to render him the author of ſin. So that we have reaſon to take heed of all doctrines that are of this tendency; ſuch as are the doctrines of an abſolute and irreſpective decree to damn the greateſt part of mankind; and in order to that, and as a means to it, efficaciouſly to permit men to ſin. For if theſe things be true, that God hath abſolutely decreed to damn the greateſt part of men, and to make good this decree he permits them to ſin, not by a bare permiſſion of leaving them to themſelves, but by ſuch a permiſſion as ſhall be efficacious; that is, he will ſo permit them to ſin as they cannot avoid it; then thoſe who are under this decree of God, are under a neceſſity of ſinning; which neceſſity, ſince it does not proceed from themſelves, but from the decree of God, does by conſequence make God the author of ſin. And then that other doctrine, which is ſubſervient to this, that God does by a phyſical and natural influence upon the minds and wills of men, determine them to every action that they do, to bad actions as well as good. I know they who ſay ſo, tell us that God only determines men to the action, but not to the evil of it. For inſtance, when *Cain* kill'd his brother, God determin'd him (they ſay) to the natural action of taking away a man's life, which in many caſes may be done without ſin. Very true: But if in theſe circumſtances the natural action could not be done without committing the ſin, he that determin'd him to the natural action, determin'd him likewiſe to the ſin.

I am far from any thought that thoſe that maintain theſe doctrines, had any intention to make God the author of ſin: but if this be the neceſſary conſequence of theſe doctrines, there is reaſon enough to reject them, how innocent ſoever the intention be of thoſe who maintain them.

Secondly, Let not us tempt any man to ſin. All piety pretends to be an imitation of God, therefore let us endeavour to be like him in this. 'Tis true indeed, we may be tempted with evil, and therefore we are likely enough to tempt others: but we ought not to do ſo. It is contrary to holineſs and goodneſs, to the temper and diſpoſition of the moſt perfect being in the world. God tempts no man; nay, it is the proper work and employment of the Devil, 'tis his very trade and profeſſion; he goes about ſeeking whom he may betray into ſin and deſtruction. To this end he walks up and down the earth, waiting all opportunities and advantages upon men to draw them into ſin; ſo that we are his factors and inſtruments, whenever we tempt men to ſin.

Let thoſe conſider this, who are ſo active and buſy to ſeduce men into any kind of wickedneſs, and to inſtruct them in the arts of iniquity, who tempt men into bad company and courſes, and take pleaſure in debauching a virtuous perſon, and make it matter of great triumph to make a ſober man drunk, as if it were ſo glorious an action to ruin a ſoul, and deſtroy that, which is more worth than the whole world. Whenever you go about this work, remember whoſe inſtruments you are, and whoſe work you do, and what kind of work it is. Tempting others to ſin is in ſcripture called murder, for which reaſon the Devil is ſaid to be *a murderer from the beginning*, becauſe he was *a tempter*. *Whoſoever committeth ſin is of the Devil*: but whoſoever tempts others to ſin, is a ſort of Devil himſelf.

Thirdly, Since God tempts no man, let us not tempt him. There is frequent mention in Scripture of mens tempting God, *i. e.* trying him as it were whether he will do any thing for their ſakes, that is miſbecoming his goodneſs, and wiſdom, and faithfulneſs, or any other of his perfections. Thus the *Iſraelites* are ſaid to have *tempted God in the wilderneſs forty years together*, and in that ſpace, more remarkably *ten times*. The meaning of which expreſſions is, that when God had promiſed *Abraham* to bring his ſeed into the land of *Canaan*, that people, by their great and repeated provocations of God, did often provoke him to have deſtroyed them, and conſequently to have fail'd of the promiſe which he made to the fathers. The Devil likewiſe tempted our Saviour to tempt God, by caſting himſelf down from the pinacle of the temple, in confidence that the Angels would take care of him: but our Saviour anſwers him, *It is written, Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* From which inſtance it appears, that men are ſaid to tempt God, whenever they expect the protection of his providence in an unwarrantable way. God hath promiſed to take care of good men, but if they neglect themſelves, or willingly caſt themſelves into danger, and expect his providence and protection, they do not truſt God, but tempt him; they try whether God's providence will countenance their raſhneſs, and provide for them, when they neglect themſelves; and protect them from thoſe dangers, to which they wilfully expoſe themſelves.

So likewiſe if we be negligent in our callings, whereby we ſhould provide for our families, if we laviſh away that which we ſhould lay up for them, and then depend upon the providence of God to ſupply them, and take care of them, we tempt God to that which is unworthy of him; which is to give approbation to our folly, and countenance our ſloth and careleſneſs. We cannot ſeduce God, and draw him to do any thing that miſbecomes him, but we tempt him in expecting the care and protection of his providence, when we wilfully run ourſelves into danger, and neglect the means of providing for our own ſafety. And thus I have done with the *firſt* great principle contain'd in the text; *viz. That God is not the author of the ſins of men.* I proceed now to the

Second, *That every man is his own greateſt tempter. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed.* God does not tempt any man to ſin: but every man is then tempted, when by his own luſt, his irregular inclination and deſire, he is ſeduced to evil, and enticed; ϗ δελεαζόμενος, is caught as it were with a bait, for ſo the Greek word ſignifies.

In which words the Apoſtle gives us a true account of the prevalency and efficacy of temptation upon men. It is not becauſe God has any deſign to enſnare men in ſin; but their own corruption and vicious inclinations ſeduce them to that which is evil. To inſtance in the particular temptations the Apoſtle was ſpeaking of, perſecution and ſuffering for the *cauſe of religion*, to avoid which, many did then forſake the truth, and apoſtatiz'd from their Chriſtian profeſſion. The true cauſe of which, was not the providence of God, which permitted them to be expos'd to thoſe ſufferings; but their inordinate love of the good things of this life, and their unreaſonable fears of the evils and ſufferings of it; they valued the enjoyments of this preſent life, more than the favour of God, and that eternal happineſs which he had promiſed to them in another life; and they feared the perſecutions of men more than the threatnings of God, and the dreadful puniſhments of another world. They had an inordinate affection for the eaſe and pleaſure of this life, and their unwillingneſs to part with theſe, was a great temptation to them to quit their religion; by this bait they were caught, when it came to the trial.

And thus it is proportionably in all other ſorts of temptations. Men are betrayed by themſelves, and the temptation without hath a party within them, with which it holds a ſecret correſpondence, and which is ready to yield and give conſent to it; ſo that it is our own conſent, and treachery to our ſelves, that makes any temptation maſter of us, and without that we are not to be overcome; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed.* It is the luſt of men complying with the temptations which are offer'd to us, which renders them effectual, and gives them the victory over us.

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall from theſe words of the Apoſtle obſerve to you theſe *two* things.

Firſt, That as the Apoſtle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo he does not aſcribe the prevalency of temptation to the Devil.

Secondly, That he aſcribes the prevalency of temptation to the luſt and vicious inclinations of men, which ſeduce them to a compliance with the temptations that are preſented to them; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed.* Theſe *two* obſervations ſhall be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe.

Firſt, That as the Apoſtle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo he does not aſcribe the prevalency and efficacy of temptation to the Devil. That he acquits God, I have ſhewn at large in my former diſcourſe. It is evident likewiſe, that he does not aſcribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the Devil; for the Apoſtle in this diſcourſe of his concerning temptations makes no expreſs mention of the Devil; he ſuppoſeth indeed, that baits are laid for men, *every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed, i. e.* when he plays with the baits that are laid for him, and ſwallows them. And the Scripture elſewhere frequently tells us, that the Devil is very active and buſy to tempt men, and is continually laying baits before them; but their own luſts are the cauſe why they are caught by them.

And I do the rather inſiſt upon this, becauſe men are apt to lay great load upon the Devil, in the buſineſs of temptation, hoping thereby either wholly, or at leaſt in a great meaſure to excuſe themſelves; and therefore I ſhall here conſider how far the Devil by his temptations is the cauſe of the ſins which men by compliance with thoſe temptations are drawn into.

Firſt, It is certain that the Devil is very active and buſy to miniſter to them the occaſion of ſin, and temptations to it. For ever ſince he fell from God, partly out of enmity to him, and partly out of envy and malice to mankind, he hath made it his great buſineſs and employment to ſeduce men to ſin; and to this end he walks up and down the earth, and watcheth all occaſions and opportunities to tempt men to ſin; and ſo far as his power reacheth, and God permits him, he lays baits and temptations before them in all their ways, preſenting them with the occaſions and opportunities to ſin, and with ſuch baits and allurements as are moſt ſuitable to their tempers, and moſt likely to prevail with their particular inclinations, and as often as he can, ſurprizing men with theſe at the eaſieſt time of acceſs, and with ſuch circumſtances, as may give his temptations the greateſt force and advantage. Of this the Scripture aſſures us in general, when it tells us of thoſe wiles and devices of Satan, and of the methods of his temptations; ſo that tho' we do not particularly diſcern how and when he doth this, yet we have no reaſon to doubt of the thing, if we believe that there is ſuch a ſpirit in the world, as the Scripture particularly tells us there is, that works in the children of diſobedience; and that God from whom nothing is hid, and who ſees all the ſecret engines which are at work in the world, to do us good or harm, hath in mercy to mankind given us particular warning of it, and that we may not be wholly ignorant of our enemies, and their malicious deſigns upon us, that we may be continually upon our guard, aware of our danger, and armed againſt it.

Secondly, The Devil does not only preſent to men the temptations and occaſions of ſin; but when he is permitted to make nearer approaches to them, does excite and ſtir them up to comply with theſe temptations, and to yield to them. And this he does, not only by employing his inſtruments, to ſolicit for him, and to draw men to ſin by bad counſel and example, which we ſee frequently done, and probably very often by the Devil's inſtigation; (thoſe who are very wicked themſelves, and conſequently more enſlaved to the Devil, and under his power, being as it were factors for him to ſeduce others;) but beſides this, 'tis not improbable but the Devil himſelf does many times immediately excite men to ſin, by working upon the humours of their bodies, or upon their imaginations; and by that means infuſing and ſuggeſting evil motions into them; or by diverting them from thoſe thoughts and conſiderations, which might check and reſtrain them from that wickedneſs to which he is tempting them; or by ſome other ways and means more ſecret and unknown to us. For the power of Spirits, whether good or bad, and the manner of their operation upon our minds, are things very ſecret, and of which we can give little or no account, but yet for all that, we have many times reaſon ſufficient to believe a thing to be ſo, when we are wholly ignorant of the manner of it.

And there is reaſon, from what is ſaid in Scripture, to believe that the Devil, in ſome caſes, hath a more immediate power and influence upon the minds of men, to excite them to ſin, and, where he diſcovers a very bad inclination or reſolution, to help it forward, and to keep men to it; as when it is ſaid, *John* xiii. 27. that *the Devil entered into Judas*, to puſh him on in that ill deſign which he had already engaged in, of betraying our Saviour. And *Acts* v. 3. Satan is ſaid to have *filled the heart of Ananias, to lie to the holy Ghoſt, and to keep back part of the price* for which he had ſold his eſtate; which expreſſions do ſeem to intimate to us ſome more immediate power and influence which the Devil had upon thoſe perſons: but then 'tis very obſervable, that this power is never aſcribed to the Devil, but in the caſe of great and horrid ſins, and where men are beforehand notoriouſly depraved, and either by the actual commiſſion of ſome former great ſin, or by entertaining ſome very wicked deſign, have provoked God to permit the Devil a nearer acceſs to them. For *Judas* had firſt taken council how to betray Chriſt, before it is ſaid *the Devil enter'd into him*, to puſh him on to the execution of it. And *Ananias* his covetouſneſs had firſt tempted him to keep back part of his eſtate, before it is ſaid *the Devil filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghoſt*; ſo that what power the Devil hath over men, they firſt give it him; they conſent to his outward temptations, before he can get within them. Hence it is that in Scripture great ſinners are deſcribed, as being more immediately under the government and influence of the Devil. *Epheſ.* ii. 1, 2. Where the Apoſtle ſpeaking of thoſe, who from heatheniſm were converted to Chriſtianity, *You* (ſays he) *hath he quicken'd, who were once dead in treſpaſſes and ſins; wherein in times paſt ye walked, according to the courſe of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the ſpirit that now worketh in the children of diſobedience, or unbelief*; τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος, *the ſpirit that ſtill acts and inſpires the children of unbelief*; that is, thoſe who continue in their infidelity, and would not believe and obey the goſpel. When men are notoriouſly wicked and diſobedient to the councils of God, the Devil is ſaid to act and inſpire them, which certainly ſignifies ſome more immediate power and influence which he hath over ſuch perſons.

For as it is very probable, that the Devil is ſometimes permitted to come near good men ſo as to tempt them; ſo by notorious wickedneſs and impiety, men do give admiſſion to him, and he is permitted by the juſt judgment of God to exerciſe greater dominion over them. By reſiſting his temptations, we drive him from us. So St. *James* tells us, *Chap.* iv. 7. *Reſiſt the Devil, and he will flee from you:* but as we yield to his temptations, he continually makes nearer approaches to us, and gains a greater power over us.

Thirdly, But for all this, the Devil can force no man to ſin; his temptations may move and excite men to ſin, but that they are prevalent and effectual, proceeds from our own will and conſent; 'tis our *own luſts* cloſing with his temptations, that produce ſin. The Devil hath more or leſs power over men, according as they give way to him; but never ſo much as to force their wills, and to compel them to conſent to, and comply with his temptations; the grace of God doth hardly offer this violence to men for their good, in order to their ſalvation; and therefore much leſs will he permit the Devil to have this power over men to their ruin and deſtruction. God's commanding us to reſiſt the Devil ſuppoſeth that his temptations are not irreſiſtible.

Fourthly, From what hath been ſaid, it appears, that tho' the Devil be frequently acceſſary to the ſins of men, yet we ourſelves are the authors of them; he tempts us many times to ſin, but it is we that commit it. His temptations may ſometimes be ſo violent as to extenuate our faulr, but never ſo forcible as wholly to excuſe us; for we are ſo far guilty of ſin, as we give our conſent to it; and how powerful ſoever the temptation be to any kind of evil, there is always enough of our own will in it to render us guilty.

I am far from thinking that the Devil tempts men to all the evil that they do. I rather think that the greateſt part of the wickedneſs that is committed in the world, ſprings from the evil motions of mens own minds. Mens own luſts are generally to them the worſt Devil of the two, and do more ſtrongly incline them to ſin, than any Devil without them can tempt them to it. It is not to be doubted, that the Devil does all the miſchief he can to the ſouls of men, ſo far as God permits him; and tho' the number of evil Angels be probably very great, yet it is but finite, and every one of them hath a limited power; and tho' they be very active, yet they can be but one where at once; ſo that his malice at the utmoſt does only all the evil that it can, not all that it would; he plyes where he has the beſt cuſtom, where he has the faireſt opportunity, and the greateſt hopes; he leaves men many times for a ſeaſon as (it is ſaid) he did our Saviour, becauſe he deſpairs of ſucceſs at that time; and it may be ſometimes when he is gone, theſe perſons grow ſecure, and through their own ſecurity and folly fall into thoſe ſins, which the Devil with all his baits and wiles, whilſt they were upon their guard, could not tempt them to commit.

Others, after he has made them ſure, and put them into the way of it, will go on of themſelves, and are as mad of ſinning, as forward to deſtroy themſelves, as the Devil himſelf could wiſh; ſo that he can hardly tempt men to any wickedneſs, which he does not find them inclin'd to of themſelves. Theſe he can truſt with themſelves, and leave them to their own inclinations and conduct, finding by experience, that they will do as ill things of their own motion, as if Satan ſtood continually at their right hand to prompt them, and put them on, ſo that he can go into a far country, and employ himſelf elſewhere, and leave them for a long time, being confident that in his abſence they will not bury their talent, and hide it in a napkin, but will improve it to a great advantage. And I wiſh that our own age did not afford us too many inſtances of this kind, of ſuch forward and expert ſinners, as need no tempter either to inſtruct or excite them to that which is evil. Now in this caſe the Devil betakes himſelf to other perſons, and removes his ſnares and baits where he thinks there is more need and occaſion for them.

So that we may reaſonably conclude, that there is a great deal of wickedneſs committed in the world, which the Devil hath no immediate hand in, tho' he always rejoiceth in it when it is done; and that there is a great deal more reaſon to attribute all good to the motions and operations of the Spirit of God, than to aſcribe all ſin and wickedneſs in the world to the Devil; becauſe the Spirit of God is more powerful, and is always every where, and is more intent upon his deſign, and as forward to promote it, as the Devil can be to carry on his work; nay, I doubt not but he is more active to excite men to good, than the Devil can be to tempt them to evil. And yet for all this I think there is no great reaſon to doubt, but that good men do many good actions of their own inclination, without any ſpecial and immediate motion from the Spirit of God. They are indeed at firſt regenerate, and ſanctified by the holy Ghoſt, and are continually afterwards under the conduct of the ſame Spirit: but where there is a new nature, it is of it ſelf inclinable to that which is good, and will bring forth fruits, and do actions anſwerable. Much leſs do I think that the Devil tempts every man to all the evil that he does, or the greateſt part. When the luſts of men, and the habits of vice are grown ſtrong and confirmed, the Devil may ſpare his temptations in a great meaſure; for after wicked men are wound up to ſuch a pitch of impiety, they will go a great while of themſelves.

I have done with the *firſt* obſervation, that as the Apoſtle acquits God from having any hand in tempting men to ſin, ſo neither does he aſcribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the Devil. I proceed to the

Second obſervation, That he aſcribes the efficacy and ſucceſs of temptation to the luſts and vitious inclinations of men, which ſeduce them to a conſent and compliance with the temptations which are afforded to them. *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt, and enticed.* We have many powerful enemies; but we are much more in danger of treachery from within, than of aſſaults from without. All the power of our enemies could not deſtroy us if we were but true to our ſelves; ſo that the Apoſtle had great reaſon to aſcribe the efficacy of temptation, to the irregular deſires and vitious inclinations of men, rather than to thoſe temptations which the providence of God permits them to be aſſaulted with, and conſequently to lay the blame of men's ſins chiefly upon themſelves.

And that chiefly upon theſe *two* accounts:

Firſt, Becauſe the luſts of men are in a great meaſure voluntary.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to reſiſt thoſe temptations, and overcome them. Now ſo far as the luſts of men are voluntary, it is their own fault that they are ſeduced by them; and if God hath put it in our power to reſiſt and overcome temptations, we may blame ourſelves, if we be overcome and foiled by them.

Firſt, The luſts of men are in a great meaſure voluntary. By the luſts of men, I mean their irregular deſires, and vitious inclinations. I grant that the nature of man is very much corrupted, and degenerated from its primitive integrity and perfection: but we who are Chriſtians, have received that grace in baptiſm, whereby our natures are ſo far healed, as if we be not wanting to our ſelves, and do not neglect the means which God hath appointed to us, we may mortify our luſts, and live a new life; ſo that if our luſts remain unmortified, we our ſelves are in fault, much more if they gain new ſtrength, and proceed to habits; for this could not be, if we did not after we come to age, and are able to diſcern between, and to chuſe good and evil, voluntarily conſent to iniquity, and by wilful and deliberate practice of known ſins, improve the evil inclinations of our nature into vitious habits: but if inſtead of mortifying and ſubduing the evil propenſions of our nature (which is no very difficult work to moſt perſons, if they begin it betimes) we will cheriſh and give new life and power to them, we forfeit the grace which we received in Baptiſm, and bring our ſelves again under the power and dominion of ſin; and no wonder then, if our luſts ſeduce us, and make us ready to comply with the temptations of the world and the Devil.

Nay, and after this it is ſtill our own fault, if we do not mortify our luſts; for if we would hearken to the counſel of God, and obey his calls to repentance, and ſincerely beg his grace and holy Spirit to this purpoſe, we might yet recover our ſelves, and *by the ſpirit mortify the luſts of the fleſh*; for tho' we have left God, he hath not quite forſaken us, but is ready to afford his grace again to us, tho' we have neglected and abuſed it, and to give his holy Spirit to thoſe that aſk him, tho' we have forfeited it; ſo that tho' our luſts ſpring from ſomething which is natural, yet that they live and have dominion over us, is voluntary, becauſe we might remedy it if we would, and make uſe of thoſe means which God in the Goſpel offers to us.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to reſiſt theſe temptations, and overcome them; ſo that it is our own fault, if we yield to them, and be overcome by them.

It is naturally in our power to reſiſt many ſorts of temptations; and the grace of God, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to our ſelves, puts it in our power to reſiſt any temptation that may happen to us.

Firſt, It is naturally in our power to reſiſt many ſorts of temptations. If we do but make uſe of our natural reaſon, and thoſe conſiderations which are common and obvious to men, we may eaſily reſiſt the temptations to a great many ſins. Some ſins are ſo horrid in their nature, that when we have the ſtrongeſt temptations to them, we cannot but have a natural averſion from them; as deliberate murder, the danger and guilt whereof, are both ſo great, as make it eaſy for any conſiderate man to reſiſt the ſtrongeſt temptation to it, even that of revenge. A plain act of injuſtice, whether by great fraud, or by downright oppreſſion, is ſo baſe and diſgraceful, ſo odious and abhorred by human nature, that it is not difficult to a man that hath but a common underſtanding, and common inclination to be honeſt, to overcome the greateſt temptation of gain and advantage; nay he muſt offer conſiderable violence to his nature and reaſon, to bring himſelf to it at firſt. Prophaneneſs and contempt of God and religion is ſo monſtrous a fault, and of ſo dreadful an appearance, that every man that will but uſe his reaſon, can have no temptation to it, either from gratifying his humour, or pleaſing his company, or ſhewing his wit, that can be of equal force with the arguments which every man's mind and conſcience is apt to ſuggeſt to him againſt it.

Nay, there are many ſins much inferior to theſe, the temptations whereto may by the ordinary reaſons and conſiderations of prudence and intereſt, be baffled and put out of countenance. To inſtance in common ſwearing, to which I think there is no temptation, either from pleaſure or advantage, but only from faſhion and cuſtom. Now this temptation is eaſy to be conquer'd, by conſidering that every man that profeſſeth to believe the Bible, muſt acknowledge it to be a ſin; and if any man be convinc'd that it is a ſin, I dare undertake to convince him that he can leave it. He that can chuſe at any time whether he will ſpeak or not (which it is certainly in every man's power to do) can chuſe whether he will ſwear when he ſpeaks. If he ſays he does it by cuſtom and habit, and when he does not think of it; a very little care and reſolution will in a ſhort time cure any man of that cuſtom; ſo that it is naturally in every man's power, to break off this ſin.

Secondly, The grace of God puts it into our power, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to our ſelves, to reſiſt any temptation that may happen to us; and what the grace of God puts into our power, is as truly in our power, as what we can do our ſelves. God offers his grace to every man under the goſpel, for he has promiſed *to give his holy Spirit to them that aſk him*, and it is naturally in every man's power to aſk it, otherwiſe the promiſe ſignifies nothing; for if no man can aſk the Spirit of God, till he firſt have it, then to promiſe it to them that aſk it, is to promiſe it to them who have it already, and then 'tis needleſs to aſk it. And if God offers his grace to every man, then 'tis every man's fault if he have it not; and every man that hath it, may by the ordinary aſſiſtance of that grace, reſiſt any ordinary temptation. And if at any time God ſuffers good men to be aſſaulted, he hath promiſed in ſuch caſes an extraordinary grace and aſſiſtance: and that either *he will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able*, or *that with the temptation he will find a way to eſcape, that we may be able to bear it.*

And thus I have done with the *ſecond* thing I propounded to ſpeak to from theſe words, *that every man is his own greateſt tempter. Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt and enticed.* And now the proper inferences from what I have been all this while diſcourſing to you are theſe *three:*

Firſt, Not to think to excuſe our ſelves, by laying the blame of our ſins upon the temptation of the Devil. That the Devil tempts us is not our fault, becauſe we cannot help it; but it is our voluntary compliance with his temptations, our conſenting to that evil which he ſolicits us to, which maketh us guilty, *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aſide of his own luſt*; The luſts of our own hearts give the efficacy to the temptations of the Devil: men many times ſin upon the motions and ſuggeſtions of the Devil: but tho' he be guilty of tempting us, we are guilty of conſenting to his temptations.

Many times we are not ſure that the Devil tempts us to ſuch a ſin, but we are ſure that we commit it, and conſequently that we are guilty of it. Nay it is certain, if there were no Devil, many would be wicked, and perhaps not much leſs wicked than they are. The luſts and vitious inclinations of men would yield to the temptations of the world, tho' there were none to manage them, and to ſet them on to the greateſt advantage; ſo that we cannot excuſe our faults upon this account, that we are tempted by the Devil. If this were a ſufficient excuſe for us, the Devil would take no pleaſure in tempting us; the whole deſign of his temptation being to make us guilty, and by the guilt of ſin to make us miſerable.

Secondly, From hence we learn what reaſon we have to pray to God, that he would *not lead us into temptation*, *i. e.* not permit us to fall into it; for in the phraſe of ſcripture, God is many times ſaid to do thoſe things, which his providence permits to be done. The beſt of us have ſome remainders of luſt, ſome irregular deſires and appetites, which will be apt to betray us to ſin, when powerful temptations are preſented to us; ſo that it is a great happineſs to the beſt of men, to be kept by the providence of God out of the way of violent temptations; for our own ſtrength to reſiſt them is but ſmall, and we are apt to be ſecure, and to neglect our guard; we are eaſy to be ſurprized, and in continual danger through our own weakneſs or careleſsneſs. Our greateſt ſecurity is, if we be ſincere, and heartily deſirous to do well, and firmly reſolved againſt ſin, and do depend upon God for his grace and aſſiſtance, that his providence will not ſuffer us to fall into the hands of dangerous and violent temptations, which probably would be too hard for us; he who knows what our ſtrength is, *will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

Thirdly, From hence we may learn the beſt way to diſarm temptations, and to take away the power of them, and that is by mortifying our luſts, and ſubduing our vitious inclinations. When this is done, (which by the grace of God may be done) temptation hath loſt its greateſt advantage upon us. 'Tis the conſpiracy of our luſts, with the temptations that ſet upon us, that betrays us into their power. The true reaſon why men fall into ſin, is not becauſe they are tempted, but becauſe there is ſomething within them, which inclines and diſpoſes them to comply with the temptation, and to yield to it. It is ſaid, when the Devil came to our Saviour to tempt him, that *he found nothing in him*, and therefore his temptations had no force upon him. The more we mortify our luſts, the leſs the Devil will find in us, for his temptations to work upon. Every ſpark is dangerous, when it falls upon combuſtible matter; but tho' ſparks fly never ſo thick, there is no danger, ſo long as there is nothing about us to catch fire.

If we will not be drawn aſide and enticed to ſin, let us mortify our luſts; for ſo far as we are mortified, we are out of the power of temptation.

Men are apt to complain of temptations, that they are too hard for them, and that they are not able to reſiſt them, tho' they pray to God continually for his grace to that purpoſe. This indeed is one means very proper and neceſſary to be uſed; but this is not all that we are to do; we muſt break off habits of ſin, and ſubdue our luſts, and keep under our inclinations, and then we ſhall find our ſelves able to reſiſt and encounter temptations with more ſucceſs. And till we do this, in vain do we pray for God's grace, and depend upon him for ſtrength to overcome the temptations that do aſſault us; for God's grace was never deſign'd to countenance the ſloth and negligence of men, but to encourage and ſecond our reſolutions and endeavours of well-doing. If we expect God's grace and aſſiſtance upon other terms, we tempt God, and provoke him to leave us to the power of temptations, to be *drawn away and enticed by our own luſts.*

SERMON LXIII.

Proving Jeſus to be the *Meſſias.*

MATTH. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Now when John had heard in priſon the works of Chriſt, he ſent two of his Diſciples, and ſaid unto him, Art thou he that ſhould come: or do we look for another? Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, Go and ſhew John again thoſe things which ye do hear, and ſee. The Blind receive their ſight, and the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleanſed, and the Deaf hear, the Dead are raiſed up, and the Poor have the Goſpel preached unto them: And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

ABOUT the time of our Saviour's appearing in the world, there was a general expectation of a great Prince, that ſhould come out of *Judæa*, and govern all nations: this the *Gentiles* had from the prophecies of the *Sibyls*, which ſpeak of a great King that was to appear in the world about that time. So *Virgil* tells us, that the time of *Auguſtus* was the utmoſt date of that prophecy;

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas:

And *Suetonius* tells us, *that all over the eaſtern countries, there was an ancient and conſtant tradition, that ſuch a Prince ſhould ſpring out of Judæa:* and for this reaſon it is, that our Saviour is call'd by the prophet, *the expectation of the nations.*

But more eſpecially among the *Jews*, there was at that time a more lively and particular expectation, grounded upon the predictions of their Prophets, of a Prince whom they call'd the *Meſſias*, or *the anointed*; and thoſe who were more devout among them, did at that time wait for his appearance; as it is ſaid of *Simeon*, that *he waited for the conſolation of Iſrael.* Hence it was, that when *John the Baptiſt* appeared in the quality of an extraordinary Prophet, *they ſent from Jeruſalem to enquire whether he were the Meſſias?* John i. 19. *The Jews ſent Prieſts and Levites from Jeruſalem to aſk him, Who art thou? And he confeſſed, and denied not, but confeſſed, I am not the Chriſt.* The *Sanhedrim*, to whom it belonged to judge who were the true Prophets, ſent to know whether he was the Meſſias or not? *he would not take this honour to himſelf*; but told them the Meſſias was juſt at hand; and the next day, when *Jeſus came to be baptized of him*, he bare record, *that he was the Son of God, and that he ſaw the Spirit deſcending and abiding upon him.*

So that it is plain that he knew him, and bare witneſs of him, which makes it the more ſtrange that here in the text, *he ſhould ſend two of his Diſciples to enquire*, whether he were the Meſſias or not? *Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another?* that is, art thou the *Meſſias*, or not? for ſo he is call'd in the ancient prophecies of him, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, he that ſhould come. *Gen.* xlix. 10. *The ſcepter ſhall not depart from Judah, till Shiloh come.*

For the reſolution of this difficulty, it is very probably ſaid by interpreters, and I think there is no reaſon to doubt of it, that *John* the *Baptiſt* did not ſend this meſſage for his own ſatisfaction, but to ſatisfy his Diſciples, who were never very willing to acknowledge *Jeſus* for the *Meſſias*, becauſe they thought he did ſhadow and cloud their maſter. From whence we may take notice, how mens judgments are apt to be perverted by faction and intereſt; and that good men are too prone to be ſwayed thereby; for ſuch we ſuppoſe the Diſciples of *John* to have been; they will not believe their own maſter, when they apprehend him to ſpeak againſt their intereſt; for they knew that they muſt riſe and fall in their reputation and eſteem, as their maſter did. They believed that their maſter was a Prophet, and came from God; yet for all that, they could not digeſt his teſtimony of Chriſt, becauſe that ſet him above their maſter; which they were ſagacious enough to perceive, that it tended to the dimunition and leſſening of themſelves: And that this was the thing which troubled them, appears plainly from the complaint which they make to their maſter, *John* iii. 26. *The Diſciples of John came to him and ſaid, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou beareſt witneſs, behold the ſame baptizeth, and all men come to him.* This troubled them, to ſee him invade their maſter's office, and that he began to have more followers than *John* had; *he baptizeth, and all men come to him.*

This prejudice *John* had endeavour'd to root out of their minds, by telling them, that he had always declared that he was not the Meſſias, *v.* 28. *You your ſelves bear me witneſs, that I ſaid, I am not the Chriſt, but that I am ſent before him.* But when he perceiv'd it ſtill to ſtick with them, and that they obſerved all his actions, and the miracles that he wrought, as if they had a mind to pick a quarrel with him, (for St. *Luke*, who relates the ſame ſtory, tells us, that when our Saviour had healed the *Centurion*'s ſervant, and raiſed from the dead the widow's ſon at *Naim*, the Diſciples of *John* ſhew'd him all theſe things) I ſay, *John Baptiſt* perceiving that they watched him ſo narrowly, ſent two of his Diſciples to him, that they might receive full ſatisfaction from him.

And St. *Luke* tells us, that upon their coming to him, he wrought many of his miracles before them, to convince them that he was the true Meſſias. *Luke* vii. 21, 22. *And in that ſame hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil ſpirits; and to many that were blind he gave ſight*; and then ſaid to the Diſciples of *John*, *Go your way, and tell John what things ye have ſeen and heard; how that the blind ſee, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raiſed, and to the poor the goſpel is preached, and bleſſed is he that is not offended in me.*

So that you ſee that the reaſon why *John Baptiſt* ſent to our Saviour to know whether he was the Meſſias, was not to ſatisfy himſelf, for he had no doubt of it; but perceiving his Diſciples to be ill-affected towards our Saviour, and hearing them ſpeak with ſome envy of his miracles, he ſent them to him, that by ſeeing what he did, and hearing what account he gave of himſelf, they might receive full ſatisfaction concerning him.

I have been the longer in the clearing of this, that men upon every appearance of contradiction in the evangelical hiſtory, may not be too forward to ſuſpect the truth of it; but may be convinc'd, that if they would but have patience to examine things carefully, they would find that the ſtory does ſufficiently vindicate it ſelf; and tho' it be penn'd with great ſimplicity, yet there is ſufficient care taken to free it from being guilty of any contradiction to it ſelf.

The occaſion of the words being thus cleared, there are in them theſe two things conſiderable.

Firſt, What it was that *John the Baptiſt* ſent his Diſciples to be ſatisfied about; and that was, *whether he was the Meſſias or not? Now when John had heard in priſon the works of Chriſt, he ſent two of his Diſciples.* The circumſtance of his being in priſon, ſeems to be mention'd, to intimate to us the reaſon why he did not come himſelf along with them; he ſent two of his Diſciples to him, who ſaid unto him, *Art thou he that ſhould come, or do we look for another?* And then

Secondly, The anſwer which our Saviour returns to this meſſage; *Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, go and ſhew John again the things which ye do ſee and hear; the blind receive their ſight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed up, and the poor have the goſpel preached unto them; and bleſſed is he, whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

So that theſe words contain, *firſt*, the evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Meſſias. *Secondly*, an intimation that notwithſtanding all this evidence which he gave of himſelf, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him; *bleſſed is he, whoſoever is not offended in me.*

Firſt, The evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Meſſias: and to prove this, there were but two things neceſſary.

1. To ſhew that he was ſent by God, and had a particular commiſſion from him.

2. That he was the very perſon of whom the Prophets foretold that he ſhould be the Meſſias.

The *firſt* of theſe he proves by the miracles which he wrought; and the *ſecond* by the correſpondency of the things he did, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Meſſias; the prophecies concerning the Meſſias were accompliſh'd in him.

Firſt, By the miracles which he wrought; *the blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raiſed up.* Here is a brief enumeration of the ſeveral ſorts of miracles which our Saviour wrought, and theſe were a teſtimony to him that *he came from God*, and was ſent and commiſſioned by him to declare his will to the world. So he himſelf tells us, *John* v. 36. *I have a greater witneſs than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame works that I do, bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me.* Upon the evidence of theſe miracles, *Nicodemus*, a ruler among the *Jews*, was convinced that he was ſent by God, *John* iii. 2. *We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do theſe miracles that thou doſt, except God be with him.* Nay his greateſt enemies were afraid of his miracles, knowing how proper an argument they are to convince men. *John* xi. 47. when *the chief prieſts and Phariſees* were met together in council againſt him, they concluded, that if he were permitted to go on and work miracles, he would draw all men after him *What do we?* (ſay they) *for this man doth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* This they ſaid, upon occaſion of the great miracle of raiſing *Lazarus* from the dead.

And in reaſon, miracles are the higheſt atteſtation that can be given to the truth and divinity of any doctrine; and ſuppoſing a doctrine not to be plainly unworthy of God, and contrary to thoſe natural notions which men have of God and religion, we can have no greater evidence of the truth of it, than miracles; they are ſuch an argument, as in its own nature is apt to perſuade and induce belief.

All truths do not need miracles; ſome are of eaſy belief, and are ſo clear by their own light, that they need neither miracle nor demonſtration to prove them. Such are thoſe ſelf-evident principles which mankind do generally agree in: others which are not ſo evident by their own light, we are content to receive upon clear demonſtration of them, or very probable arguments for them, without a miracle. And there are ſome truths, which however they may be ſufficiently obſcure and uncertain to moſt men, yet are they ſo inconſiderable, and of ſo ſmall conſequence, as not to deſerve the atteſtation of miracles;

cles; ſo that there is no reaſon to expect that God ſhould interpoſe by a miracle, to convince men of them.

> *Nec Deus interſit, niſi dignus vindice nodus*
> *Inciderit.*

But for ſuch truths as are neceſſary to be known by us, but are not ſufficiently evident of themſelves, nor capable of cogent evidence, eſpecially to prejudiced and intereſted perſons, God is pleaſed in this caſe many times to work miracles for our conviction; and they are a proper argument to convince us of a thing that is either in its ſelf obſcure and hard to be believed, or which we are prejudiced againſt, and hardly brought to believe; for they are an argument *à majori ad minus,* they prove a thing which is obſcure and hard to be believed, by ſome thing that is more incredible, which yet they cannot deny becauſe they ſee it done. Thus our Saviour proves himſelf to be an extraordinary perſon, by *doing ſuch things as never man did*; he convinceth them, that they ought to believe what he ſaid, becauſe they ſaw him do thoſe things, which were harder to be believed (if one had not ſeen them) than what he ſaid.

Miracles are indeed the greateſt external confirmation and evidence that can be given to the truth of any doctrine, and where they are wrought with all the advantages they are capable of, they are an unqueſtionable demonſtration of the truth of it; and ſuch were our Saviour's miracles here in the text, to prove that he was the true Meſſias; here are miracles of all kinds, *the blind receive their ſight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raiſed up.* For the nature of them, they are ſuch as are moſt likely to be divine and to come from God, for they were healing and beneficial to mankind. Our Saviour here inſtanceth in thoſe things which are of greateſt benefit and advantage, and which free men from the greateſt miſeries and inconveniencies; the reſtoring of ſight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; ſoundneſs and health to the lame and the leprous, and life to the dead. And then for the number of them, they were many; not one inſtance of a kind, but ſeveral of every kind, and great multitudes of moſt of them; and for the manner of their operation, they were publick, in the ſight and view of great multitudes of people, to free them from all ſuſpicion of fraud and impoſture; they were not wrought privately and in corners, and given out and noiſed abroad, but before all the people, ſo that every one might ſee them, and judge of them; not only among his own Diſciples and followers, as the Church of *Rome* pretends to work theirs, but among his enemies, *to convince thoſe that did not believe*; and this not done once, and in one place, but at ſeveral times, and in all places where he came, and for a long time, for three years and a half; and after his death, he endowed his Diſciples and followers with the ſame power, which laſted for ſome ages. And then for the quality of them, they were miracles of the greateſt magnitude; thoſe of them, which in themſelves might have been performed by natural means, as healing the lame, and the leprous, and the deaf, he did in a miraculous manner, by a word or a touch, yea and many times at a great diſtance. But others were not only in the manner of their operation, but in the nature of the thing unqueſtionably miraculous, as giving of ſight to thoſe that had been born blind, and raiſing up the dead to life, as *Lazarus,* after he had lain in the grave four days; and himſelf afterwards, the third day after he had been buried; which, if there ever was or can be any unqueſtionable miracles in the world, ought certainly to be reputed ſuch. So that our bleſſed Saviour had all the atteſtation that miracles can give, that he came from God. And this is the *firſt* evidence of his being the Meſſias.

The *Jews* acknowledge that the Meſſias when he comes ſhall work great miracles; their own *Talmud* confeſſeth, that *Jeſus the ſon of Joſeph and Mary did work great miracles*; and the hiſtory of the goſpel does particularly relate more and greater miracles wrought by him, than by *Moſes* and all the Prophets that had been ſince the world began; ſo that we may ſtill put the ſame queſtion to the *Jews,* which they did in our Saviour's time to one another; *when Chriſt cometh,* when the Meſſias whom ye expect comes, *will he do more miracles than theſe which this man hath done?*

But, *Secondly,* this will yet more clearly appear by the correſpondency of the things here mentioned, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Meſſias.

Not to mention innumerable circumſtances of his birth, and life, and death, and reſurrection, and aſcenſion into heaven, together with the ſucceſs and prevalency of his doctrine in the world, all which are punctually foretold by ſome or other of the Prophets: I ſhall confine myſelf to the particulars here in the text.

Firſt, It was foretold of the Meſſias, that he ſhould work miraculous cures. *Iſa.* xxxv. 4, 5, 6. ſpeaking of the Meſſias, *he will come and ſave you; then the eyes of the blind ſhall be opened, and the ears of the deaf ſhall be unſtopp'd; then ſhall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb ſing*; this you ſee was fulfilled here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, the text mentions another miracle which is not in the prophet, that *he raiſed the dead*; but if God did more than he promiſed and foretold, this is no prejudice to the argument, if all that he foretold was accompliſh'd in him. Beſides, the *Jews* have a proverb, that God is not content to perform barely what he promiſeth, but *he uſually doth ſomething over and above his promiſe*. That the Meſſias ſhould *heal the blind*, and *the deaf*, and *the lame*, *Iſaiah* propheſied; and God makes good this promiſe and prediction to the full; the Meſſias did not only do theſe, but, which is more and greater than any of theſe, *he raiſed the dead to life*.

Secondly, It was likewiſe foretold of the Meſſias, that he *ſhould preach the Goſpel to the poor*, Iſa. lxi. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek*, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι πτωχοῖς, *to preach the Goſpel* or *good tidings to the poor*; ſo the LXXII render the words; and they are the very words uſed by our Saviour here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, this was no miracle, but it was the punctual accompliſhment of a prophecy concerning the Meſſias, and conſequently an evidence that he was the Meſſias. But beſides it had ſomething in it which was very ſtrange to the *Jews*, and very different from the way of their doctors and teachers; for the *Rabbies* among the *Jews* would ſcarce inſtruct any but for great reward; they would meddle with none but thoſe that were able to requite their pains; the ordinary and poorer ſort of people they had in great contempt, as appears by that ſlighting expreſſion of them, *John* vii. 48, 49. *Have any of the rulers or of the Phariſees believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the law are curſed.* And *Grotius* upon this text tells us, that the Jewiſh maſters had this fooliſh and inſolent proverb among them, that *the Spirit of God doth not reſt but upon a rich man*, to which this prediction concerning the Meſſias was a direct contradiction: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach the Goſpel to the poor.* In old time the Prophets were eſpecially ſent to the *Kings* and *Princes* of the people: but this great Prophet comes *to preach the Goſpel to the poor*. None have ſo little reaſon to be proud as the ſons of men, but never was any ſo humble as the Son of God; our Saviour's whole life and doctrine was a contradiction to the falſe opinions of the world; *they* thought the rich and great men of the world the only happy perſons, but *he* came *to preach glad tidings to the poor*, to bring good news to them whom the great doctors of the law deſpiſed, and ſet at nought; and therefore to confound their pride and folly, and to confute their falſe opinions of things, he begins that excellent ſermon of his with this ſaying, *Bleſſed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*

Thirdly, It was foretold of the Meſſias, that the world ſhould be offended at him, *Iſa.* viii. 14. *He ſhall be for a ſtone of ſtumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houſes of Iſrael.* And *Iſa.* liii. 1, 2, 3. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? he hath no form nor comelineſs, and when we ſee him, there is no beauty that we ſhould deſire him; he is deſpiſed and rejected of men, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was deſpiſed and we eſteemed him not*; and this likewiſe is intimated in the laſt words of the text, *and bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* Intimating that notwithſtanding the great works that he did among them, which teſtified of him that he came from God, notwithſtanding the predictions of their prophets concerning the Meſſias were ſo clearly and punctually accompliſh'd in him; yet notwithſtanding all this, they would take offence at him upon one account or other, and reject him and his doctrine; but even this, that they rejected him, and would not own him for their Meſſias, was another ſign or evidence that he was the true Meſſias foretold by the Prophets: for among other things this was expreſſly predicted concerning him, that he ſhould be deſpiſed and rejected of men.

And thus I have done with the firſt thing I propounded to ſpeak to; namely, the *evidence* which our Saviour here gives of his being the true Meſſias.

Firſt, The many and great miracles which he wrought, prove that he came from God. And, *Secondly*, The correſpondence of the things he did, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the Meſſias, declare him to be the true Meſſias.

I now proceed to the next thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely,

Secondly, An *intimation* in the text, that notwithſtanding all the evidence Chriſt gave of himſelf, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him, and his doctrine. In ſpeaking to which, it will be very proper to conſider,

Firſt, How *the poor* came to be more diſpoſed to receive the goſpel, than others.

Secondly, What thoſe prejudices are which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at its firſt appearance, as alſo thoſe which men have at this day againſt the chriſtian religion, and to endeavour to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

Thirdly, How happy a thing it is to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men have againſt religion.

Firſt, How the *poor* came to be more diſpoſed to receive the Goſpel than others; *the poor have the goſpel preached unto them.* Which does not only ſignify that our Saviour did more eſpecially apply himſelf to them, but likewiſe that they were in a nearer diſpoſition to receive it, and did of all others give the moſt ready entertainment to his doctrine: and this our Saviour declares to us in the beginning of his ſermon upon the mount, when he pronounceth the *poor* bleſſed upon this account, becauſe they were nearer to the kingdom of God than others; *bleſſed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.* So likewiſe St. *James*, Chap. ii. *v*, 5. *Hath not God choſen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promiſed to them that love him?* So that it ſeems the *poor* were upon ſome account or other in a nearer diſpoſition to receive the goſpel, than the *great* and *rich* men of this world. And of this there are three accounts to be given.

Firſt, The poor had no earthly intereſt to engage them to reject our Saviour and his doctrine, The high-prieſts, and ſcribes, and phariſees among the Jews, they had a plain worldly intereſt which did engage them to oppoſe our Saviour and his doctrine; for if he were received for the Meſſias, and his doctrine embraced, they muſt of neceſſity loſe their ſway and authority among the people; and all that which render'd them ſo conſiderable, their pretended ſkill in the law, and in the traditions and obſervances of their fathers, together with their external ſhews of piety and devotion, would ſignify nothing; if our Saviour and his doctrine ſhould take place. And there are very few ſo honeſt and ſincere, as to be content for truth's ſake, to part with their reputation and authority, and to become leſs in the eſteem of men than they were before. Few are ſo impartial as to quit thoſe things which they have once laid great weight upon, and kept a great ſtir about, becauſe this is to acknowledge that they were in an error, and miſtaken in their zeal, which few have the ingenuity to own, tho' it be never ſo plain to others; and therefore it is no wonder that our Saviour's doctrine met with ſo much reſiſtance from thoſe, who were ſo much concern'd in point of honour and reputation, to make head againſt it. And this account our Saviour himſelf gives of their infidelity, *John* v. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and ſeek not the honour which cometh of God only?* and Chap. xii. 43. *For they loved the praiſe of men more than the praiſe of God.*

And beſides the point of reputation, thoſe that were rich, were concerned in point of intereſt, to oppoſe our Saviour and his doctrine; becauſe he call'd upon men *to deny themſelves, and to part with houſes and lands, yea and life it ſelf, for his ſake, and for the goſpel's*, which muſt needs be a very hard and unpleaſant doctrine to rich men, who had great eſtates, and had ſet their hearts upon them. Upon this account it is that our Saviour pronounceth it ſo *hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*; and compares it with thoſe things that are moſt difficult, and humanly impoſſible; *I ſay unto you, it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

But now the *poor* were free from theſe incumbrances and temptations; they had nothing to loſe, and therefore our Saviour's doctrine went down more eaſily with them; becauſe it did not contradict their intereſt, as it did the intereſt of thoſe who had great eſtates and poſſeſſions.

Secondly, Another reaſon of this is, that thoſe that are *poor*, and enjoy little of the good things of this life, are willing to entertain good news of happineſs in another, Thoſe who are in a ſtate of preſent miſery and ſuffering, are glad to hear that it ſhall be well with them hereafter, and are willing to liſten to the good news of a future happineſs;

neſs; and therefore our Saviour, when he had pronounced the *poor, bleſſed*, Luke vi. 20. adds by way of oppoſition, *v.* 24. *But wo unto you that are rich; for ye have received your conſolation.* They were in ſo comfortable a condition at preſent, that they were not much concerned what ſhould become of them hereafter; whereas all the comfort that *poor men have*, is the hopes of a better condition, *non ſi male nunc, & olim ſic erit*, that *if it be bad now, it will not be ſo always*; and therefore no wonder if the promiſes and aſſurance of a future happineſs be very welcome to them.

Thirdly, If by the *poor* we do not only underſtand thoſe who are in a low and mean condition as to the things of this world, but ſuch likewiſe as had a temper and diſpoſition of mind ſuitable to the poverty of their outward condition, which our Saviour calls *poverty of ſpirit*, by which he means *meekneſs* and *humility*, there is no doubt but that ſuch a frame and temper of ſpirit is a great diſpoſition to the receiving of truth. And that this is included in the notion of *poverty*, is very plain, both from the words of the prophecy I cited before, *Iſa.* lxi. 1. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted*; and likewiſe from our Saviour's deſcription of theſe perſons, in one of the Evangeliſts, *Matth.* v. 3. *Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.* So that by the *poor* who are ſo nearly diſpoſed to receive the Goſpel, our Saviour intended thoſe, who, being in a *poor* and *low* condition in reſpect of outward things, were likewiſe *meek* and *humble* in their ſpirits. Now meekneſs, and humility are great diſpoſitions to the entertaining of truth. Theſe graces and virtues do prepare the minds of men for learning and inſtruction; meekneſs and modeſty, and humility, are the proper diſpoſitions of a ſcholar. He that hath a mean opinion of himſelf is ready to learn of others; he who is not blinded by pride, or paſſion, is more apt to conſider things impartially, and to paſs a truer judgment upon them, than the proud and the paſſionate. Paſſion and Pride are great obſtacles to the receiving of truth, and to our improvement in knowledge. Paſſion does not only darken the minds of men, but puts a falſe biaſs upon our judgments, which draws them off many times from truth, and ſways them that way to which our paſſion inclines them. A man of a calm and meek temper ſtands always indifferent for the receiving of truth, and holds the ballance of his judgment even; but paſſion ſways and inclines it one way, and that commonly againſt truth and reaſon. So likewiſe pride is a great impediment to knowledge, and the very worſt quality that a learner can have; it obſtructs all the paſſages whereby knowledge ſhould enter into us, it makes men refuſe inſtruction, out of a conceit they need it not. Many men might have known more, had it not been for the vain opinion which they have entertained of the ſufficiency of their knowledge. This is true in all kinds of learning, but more eſpecially as to the knowledge of divine things. For God loves to communicate himſelf and beſtow his grace and wiſdom upon meek and humble minds. So the Scripture tells us, *Pſal.* xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways.* And 1 *Pet.* v. 5. *Be cloathed with humility; for God reſiſteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

And thus I have ſhewn in what reſpects the *poor* were more diſpoſed for the receiving the goſpel, than others. I proceed now to the

Second thing, namely, What thoſe prejudices and objections are, which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at their firſt appearance; as alſo to enquire into thoſe which men have at this day againſt the chriſtian religion, and to ſhew the weakneſs and unreaſonableneſs of them. I begin,

Firſt, With thoſe prejudices which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at their firſt appearance.

Both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were offended at him and his doctrine; but not both upon the ſame account. They both took exceptions at him, eſpecially at his low and ſuffering condition; but not both upon the ſame reaſon. I ſhall begin with the exceptions which the *Jews* took againſt our bleſſed Saviour and his religion; and I ſhall reduce them all, or at leaſt the moſt conſiderable of them (as I find them diſperſed in the hiſtory of the goſpel, and in the *Acts* of the Apoſtles) to theſe ſix heads:

Firſt, The exceptions which they took againſt him upon account of his extraction and original.

Secondly, At the meanneſs of his condition, contrary to their univerſal expectation.

Thirdly, As to his miracles.

Fourthly, His converſation.

Fiſthly, The prejudice that lay againſt him from the oppoſition that was made by perſons of greateſt knowledge and authority among them. And,

Laſtly, That the religion which he endeavoured to introduce, did aboliſh and ſuperſede their antient religion, as of no longer uſe and continuance, though it was plain it was at firſt inſtituted by God.

Firſt, The exceptions which they took at his extraction and original. In relation to this they were offended at three things.

1. That his original was known among them. This you find urged againſt him, *John* vii. 27. *We know this man whence he is, but when the Meſſias comes, no man knows whence he is.*

This to be ſure was no juſt exception in reaſon againſt him. For what if his extraction were known, might he not be from God for all that? They owned *Moſes* for the greateſt Prophet that ever was, and yet it was very well known from whence he was.

But they ſeem to refer to ſome prophecy of the Old Teſtament, which did ſeem to aſſert ſo much. If they meant that his extraction ſhould be altogether unknown; they knew very well, and believed the contrary, that *he was to be of the line of David, and to come out of Bethlehem.* If they referr'd to that prophecy, that *a virgin ſhould conceive and bear a ſon*, and ſo underſtood that he ſhould be without father; this was really true, tho' they thought that he was the Son of *Joſeph*. And if he affirmed that he had no father, he did ſufficiently juſtify it by his miracles; that being as eaſy to be believed poſſible by a divine power, as the miracles which he wrought; which yet they could not deny, becauſe they ſaw them.

2. Another prejudice againſt his extraction, was the meanneſs of his parents and breeding. This you find mentioned, *Matth.* xiii. 54, 55. *Whence hath this man this wiſdom, and theſe mighty works? is not this the carpenter's ſon? is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James and Joſes, and Simon and Judas? and his ſiſters, are they not all with us? whence then hath this man theſe things? and they were offended in him.* And ſo likewiſe, *John* vii. 15. *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*

A ſtrange prejudice and moſt unreaſonable! They could not believe him to be an extraordinary perſon, becauſe his parents and relations, his birth and breeding were ſo mean. He had been brought up to a trade, and not brought up to learning: whereas in reaſon, this ought to have been an argument juſt the other way; that he was an extraordinary perſon, and divinely aſſiſted, who all on the ſudden, without the help and aſſiſtance of education, gave ſuch evidence of his great wiſdom and knowledge, and did ſuch mighty works. This could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean; therefore there muſt be ſomething extraordinary and divine in it. Thus another man, who had been free from prejudice, would have reaſoned.

3. The moſt unreaſonable prejudice of all, in reſpect of his extraction, was grounded upon a ſpiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our Saviour was brought up, and they ſuppoſed him to be born; and that was *Galilee*, John i. 46. *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* and *John* vii. 41. *Shall the Meſſias come out of Galilee?* and v. 52. *Search and look, for out of Galilee ariſeth no Prophet.*

But it ſeems *Nathaniel*, who was a good man, was eaſily taken off from this common prejudice, when *Philip* ſaid to him, *come and ſee.* He bids him come and ſee the works he did, and then refers it to him, whether he would believe his own eyes, or an old proverb: However, it ſeems the *Jews* laid great weight upon it, as if this alone were enough to confute all his miracles, and after they had ſhot this bolt at him, the buſineſs were concluded clearly againſt him. But prudent and conſiderate men do not uſe to give much credit to ill-natur'd proverbs; the good or bad characters which are given of countreys are not underſtood to be univerſally true, and without exception. There is no place but hath brought forth ſome brave ſpirits, and excellent perſons; whatever the general temper and diſpoſition of the inhabitants may be. Among the *Grecians*, the *Bœotians* were eſteemed a dull people, even to a proverb; and yet *Pindar*, one of their chief poets, was one of them. The *Scythians* were a barbarous nation, and one would have thought no good could have come from thence; and yet that country yielded *Anacharſis* an eminent philoſopher. The *Idumeans* were aliens and ſtrangers to the covenant; and yet *Job*, one of the beſt men that ever was, came from thence. God can raiſe up eminent perſons from any place; *Abraham* from *Ur* of the *Chaldees*, and an idolatrous people. Nay, as our Saviour tells us, *he can out of ſtones raiſe up children unto Abraham.* The wiſe God, in the government of the world, does not tie himſelf to our

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fooliſh proverbs. It is not neceſſary to make a man a Prophet, that he ſhould be bred in a good air. If God ſends a man, it matters not from what place he comes.

Secondly, Another head of exception againſt our Saviour, was the meanneſs of his outward condition, ſo contrary to the univerſal expectation of the *Jews*. The *Jews* from the tradition of their fathers, to which they (as the church of *Rome* does at this day) paid a greater reverence than to the written word of God, were poſſeſt with a ſtrong perſuaſion, that the *Meſſias*, whom they expected, was to be a great prince and conqueror, and to ſubdue all nations to them; ſo that nothing could be a greater defeat to their expectations, than the mean and low condition in which our Saviour appeared; ſo that upon this account they were almoſt univerſally offended at him.

But this prejudice was very unreaſonable. For neither did their Prophets foretel any ſuch thing, as the temporal greatneſs of the *Meſſias*: but on the contrary moſt expreſſly, that *he ſhould be deſpiſed and rejected of men*, that *he ſhould be a man of ſorrows and ſufferings*, and at laſt *be put to death*; which was directly contrary to what they expected from their ill-grounded tradition.

Thirdly, Againſt his miracles they made theſe two exceptions:

1. That he wrought them by magical ſkill, and by the power of the Devil.

Which was ſo exorbitantly unreaſonable and malicious, that our Saviour pronounceth it to be an *unpardonable* ſin; and for anſwer to it, appeals to every man's reaſon, whether it was likely *that the Devil ſhould conſpire againſt himſelf, and aſſiſt any man to overthrow his own kingdom?* For it was plain, our Saviour's doctrine was directly contrary to the Devil's deſign; and therefore to aſſiſt him to work miracles for the confirmation of it, muſt have been apparently againſt his own intereſt, and to the ruin of his own kingdom.

2. They pretended that though he did many great works, yet he gave them no ſign from heaven. *Matth.* xvi. 1. it is ſaid, *They deſired him to ſhew them a ſign from heaven.* It ſeems they expected that God ſhould give ſome immediate teſtimony to him from heaven; as he did to *Elias*, when fire came down from heaven, and conſumed his enemies; and particularly they expected, that when he was upon the croſs, if he were the true *Meſſias*, he ſhould have come down and ſaved himſelf. And becauſe he did not anſwer their expectation in this, they concluded him an impoſtor.

Now what could be more unreaſonable, when he had wrought ſo many other and great miracles, perverſly to inſiſt upon ſome particular kind of miracle which they fancied? as if God were bound to gratify the curioſity of men; and as if our Saviour were not as much *declared to be the Son of God, by riſing again from the dead*, as if he had *come down from the Croſs*.

Fourthly, As to his converſation, they had theſe three exceptions:

1. That he uſed no ſeverity in his habit or diet, took too much freedom, as they thought; *came eating and drinking*, that is, he freely uſed the creatures of God, for the end for which they were given, with temperance and thankſgiving; and did not lay thoſe rigorous reſtraints upon himſelf in theſe matters, which many, that were eſteemed the moſt religious among them, uſed to do.

But he plainly ſhews them, that this exception was meerly out of their prejudice againſt him. For if he had come in the way of auſterity, they would have rejected him as well. They were reſolved to find fault with him, whatever he did. *Matth.* xi. 16. *Whereunto ſhall I liken this generation? John the Baptiſt came neither eating nor drinking, and they ſay he hath a Devil.* He lived in a more auſtere and melancholy way, *he came in the way of righteouſneſs*, uſed great ſtrictneſs and ſeverity in his habit and diet, and this they took exception at. Our Saviour was of a quite contrary temper, and that did not pleaſe them neither. *The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they ſay, behold, a wine-bibber, and a glutton.* So that let our Saviour have done what he would, he could not have carried himſelf ſo as to have eſcaped the cenſures of men, ſo peeviſhly and perverſly diſpoſed.

2. That he kept company with publicans and ſinners.

To which exception nothing can be more reaſonable than our Saviour's own anſwer; that he was ſent to be *a phyſician* to the world, *to call ſinners to repentance*; and therefore they had no reaſon to be angry, or think it ſtrange, if he converſed with his *patients* among whom his proper employment lay.

3. They objected to him prophaneneſs in breaking the ſabbath, and that ſurely was plain, that *he could not be of God, if he kept not the ſabbath-day.* The truth was, he had healed one on the ſabbath-day.

To this our Saviour gives a moſt reaſonable and ſatisfactory anſwer, that ſurely *it was lawful to do good on the ſabbath-day*; that *that* was but a *poſitive inſtitution*, but works of mercy are *natural* and *moral* duties; and God himſelf had declared, that he would have even his own *inſtitutions* to give way to thoſe greater duties, that are of *natural* and *eternal* obligation. *I will have mercy and not ſacrifice.* And then from the *end* of the ſabbath; the ſabbath was made for the reſt and refreſhment of man; and therefore could not be preſumed to be intended to his prejudice. *The ſabbath was made for man: and not man for the ſabbath.*

Fifthly, Another great prejudice againſt him, was, that perſons of the greateſt knowledge and authority among them did not embrace his doctrine. *John* vii. 48. *Have any of the rulers or Phariſees believed on him?* So that here was the *infallible rule and authority* of their *church* againſt him.

There is no doubt, but the example and authority of our guides ought to ſway very much with us, and over-rule us in doubtful caſes; but not againſt plain and convincing evidence; there we ought to follow *and obey God rather than men.* There is ſometimes a viſible and palpable corruption in thoſe who are to lead us; they may have an intereſt to oppoſe the truth: And thus it was with the Phariſees and rulers at that time; and ſo it hath been among Chriſtians in the great degeneracy of the *Roman* church. The chriſtian religion was never more endangered, nor ever more corrupted, than by thoſe who have been in greateſt authority in that church, who ought to have underſtood religion beſt, and have been the principal ſupport of it. *Men may err*; but *God cannot*: So that when God ſends a Prophet, or by his word does plainly declare his will to us, human example and authority ceaſeth, and is of no force.

The *laſt* prejudice I ſhall mention, which the *Jews* had againſt our Saviour and his doctrine, was, that it did aboliſh and ſuperſede their religion, as of no longer uſe and continuance, though it was plain it was inſtituted by God.

This had been a very ſpecious pretence indeed, had not this been part of their religion, and had not their own Prophets foretold, that the Meſſias ſhould come and perfect what was wanting and defective in their inſtitution. It is expreſly ſaid in their law, *That God would raiſe unto them another Prophet, like to Moſes, and that they ſhould hear him*, when he came. So that in truth it was the accompliſhment of all thoſe revelations which were made to the *Jews*, and did not reprove the *Jewiſh* religion as *falſe*, but as *imperfect*; and did not *contradict* and *overthrow*, but *perfect and fulfil the law and the Prophets.*

And thus I have gone over the chief exceptions and offences which the *Jews* took at our Saviour and his doctrine; and I hope ſufficiently ſhewn the unreaſonableneſs of them. I have not now time to proceed to what remains: But by what hath been ſaid, you may eaſily ſee, upon what ſlight and unreaſonable grounds men may be prejudiced againſt the beſt perſon and things, and yet be very confident all the while that they are in the right. For ſo no doubt many of the *Jews*, who oppoſed our Saviour and his doctrine, thought themſelves to be. Therefore it concerns us to put on meekneſs, and humility, and modeſty, that we may be able to judge impartially of things, and our minds may be preſerved free and indifferent to receive the truths of God, when they are offer'd to us: Otherwiſe ſelf-conceit and paſſion will ſo blind our minds, and biaſs our judgments, that we ſhall be unable to diſcern, and unwilling to entertain the plaineſt and moſt evident truths. We ſee here by the ſad example of the *Jews*, that by giving way to paſſion, and cheriſhing pride and ſelf-conceit, men may be ſo deeply prejudiced againſt the truth, as to reſiſt the cleareſt light, and reject even ſalvation itſelf, when it is offered to them. So that is not in vain, that the Scripture ſaith, *Let every man be ſwift to hear, and ſlow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God:* and exhorts us ſo earneſtly, *to receive with meekneſs the word of God, which is able to ſave our ſouls.*

The Firſt Sermon on this Text.

SERMON LXIV.

The Prejudices againſt Chriſtianity conſider'd.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

I Have from theſe words propounded to conſider *two* things.

I. Thoſe prejudices and objections which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion at their firſt appearance; as alſo to enquire into thoſe which men at this day do more eſpecially inſiſt upon, againſt the chriſtian religion; and to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

II. How happy a thing it is to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men have againſt religion.

I have enter'd upon the *firſt* of theſe, the prejudices which the world had againſt our Saviour and his religion. When this great teacher of mankind came from God, though he gave all imaginable teſtimony and evidence that he was ſent from heaven; yet the greateſt part of the world, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were mightily offended at him, and deeply prejudiced againſt him and his doctrine; but not both upon the ſame account.

I have already given you an account of the chief exceptions which the *Jews* made againſt our Saviour and his doctrine, and have ſhewn the unreaſonableneſs of them.

I proceed now to conſider the principal of thoſe exceptions, which the *Gentiles* and *Heathen* Philoſophers took at our Saviour and his doctrine. I ſhall mention theſe four:

Firſt, That Chriſtianity was a great innovation, and contrary to the received inſtitutions of the world.

Secondly, They objected againſt the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the doctrine.

Thirdly, That it wanted demonſtration.

Fourthly, That the low and ſuffering condition of our Saviour was unſuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by him for a teacher and reformer of the world. Theſe are the chief exceptions which the *Heathen*, and eſpecially their *Philoſophers*, took at our Saviour and his doctrine.

Firſt, That the chriſtian religion was a great innovation, and contrary to the receiv'd inſtitutions of the world; and conſequently that it did condemn the religion which had been ſo univerſally received and eſtabliſhed in the world by ſo long a continuance of time. And no wonder if this made a great impreſſion upon them, and raiſed a mighty prejudice in the minds of men againſt the chriſtian religion; no prejudices being ſo ſtrong as thoſe that are fix'd in the minds of men by education: And of all the prejudices of education, none ſo violent and hard to be removed, as thoſe about religion, yea though they be never ſo groundleſs and unreaſonable. *Hath a nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods?* Intimating to us, that men are very hardly brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, how abſurd ſoever it be. When Chriſtianity was firſt propounded to the Heathen world, had men been free and indifferent, and not prepoſſeſs'd with other apprehenſions of God and religion, it might then have been expected from them, that they ſhould have entertain'd it with a readineſs of mind proportionable to the reaſonableneſs of it. But the caſe was quite otherwiſe, the world had for many ages been brought up to another way of worſhip, and inur'd to rites and ſuperſtitions of a quite different nature. And this ſways very much with men; *Sequimur majores noſtros, qui feliciter ſequuti ſunt ſuos*; as one of the Heathens ſaid in thoſe days; *We follow our anceſtors, who happily follow'd theirs.* Men are hardly brought to condemn thoſe opinions and cuſtoms in religion, which themſelves and their forefathers have always embraced and followed. And wiſe men eſpecially are loth to admit ſo great a change in a matter of ſo great concernment as religion is. So that this muſt be acknowledged to have been a conſiderable prejudice againſt the chriſtian religion at its firſt appearance. But yet upon a thorough examination, this will not be found ſufficient in reaſon to with-hold men from embracing Chriſtianity, if we conſider theſe *four* things:

1. No prudent perſon thinks that the example and cuſtom of his forefathers obligeth him to that which is evil in itſelf, and pernicious to him that does it; and there is no evil, no danger equal to that of a falſe religion; for that tends to the ruin of mens ſouls, and their undoing for ever. A man might better alledge the example of his forefathers to juſtify his errors and follies in any other kind, than in this, which is ſo infinitely pernicious in the conſequences of it.

2. In a great corruption and degeneracy, it is no ſufficient reaſon againſt a reformation, that it makes a change. When things are amiſs, it is always fit to amend and reform them; and this cannot be done without a change. The wiſeſt among the heathens did acknowledge, that their religion was mix'd with very great follies and ſuperſtitions, and that the lives and manners of men were extremely corrupt and degenerate; and they endeavour'd, as much as they could, and durſt, to reform theſe things. And therefore there was no reaſon to oppoſe an effectual reformation, for fear of a change; a change of things for the better, tho' it be uſually hard to be effected, being always a thing to be deſired and wiſhed for.

3. The change which Chriſtianity deſign'd, was the leaſt liable to exception that could be, being nothing elſe in the main of it, but the reducing of natural religion, the bringing of men back to ſuch apprehenſions of God, and ſuch a way of worſhipping him, as was moſt ſuitable to the divine nature, and to the natural notions of mens minds; nothing elſe but a deſign to perſuade men of the one true God, maker of the world, that he is a Spirit, and to be worſhipp'd in ſuch a manner as is ſuitable to his ſpiritual nature. And then for matters of practice, to bring men to the obedience of thoſe precepts of temperance, and juſtice, and charity, which had been univerſally acknowledged even by the heathens themſelves to be the great duties which men owe to themſelves and others. And that this is the main deſign of the chriſtian religion, the Apoſtle hath told us in moſt plain expreſs words, *Tit.* ii. 11, 12. *The grace of God*, (that is, the doctrine of the Goſpel) *which hath appeared to all men, and brings ſalvation, teacheth us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.*

And all that the chriſtian religion adds beyonds this, is means and helps for our direction, and aſſiſtance, and encouragement in the diſcharge and performance of theſe duties. For our direction, God hath ſent his Son in our nature, to declare his will to us, and to be a pattern and example of holineſs and virtue. For our aſſiſtance, he hath promiſed the aids of his Holy Spirit; and for our encouragement, he offers to us pardon of ſin in the blood of his Son, and eternal life and happineſs in another world. This is a ſhort ſum and abridgment of the chriſtian religion, and there is nothing of all this that can reaſonably be excepted againſt.

4. God, conſidering the prejudice of the heathen againſt Chriſtianity, by reaſon of their education in a contrary religion, was ſtrong and violent, was pleaſed to give ſuch evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, as was of proportionable ſtrength and force to remove and conquer this prejudice. He was pleaſed to give teſtimony to the firſt founder of this religion by mighty miracles, and particularly by his reſurrection from the dead: But becauſe the report of theſe things was only brought to the heathen world, and they had not ſeen theſe things themſelves; therefore he enabled thoſe who were the witneſſes of theſe things to the world, to work as great miracles as he had done. And when they ſaw thoſe who gave teſtimony to our Saviour's miracles, do as great and ſtrange things themſelves, as they teſtify'd of him, there was no reaſon any longer to doubt of the truth of their teſtimony. So that though the prejudice of the Heathen againſt Chriſtianity was very great, yet the evidence which God gave to it was ſtrong enough to remove it. The doctrine of Chriſtianity was ſuch as might have recommended itſelf to impartial men, by its own reaſonableneſs: But meeting with violent prejudices in thoſe to whom it was offer'd, God was pleaſed to give ſuch a confirmation to it, as was ſufficient to bear down thoſe prejudices.

Secondly, Another objection againſt Chriſtianity, was the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the doctrine. They expected ſome deep ſpeculations in natural or moral Philoſophy; they made full account, a teacher ſent from heaven would have inſtructed them in the profoundeſt points, and diſcours'd to them about the firſt principles of things, and the nature of the ſoul, and the chief end of man, with a ſubtilty and eloquence infinitely beyond that of their greateſt ſophiſters, and able to bear down all oppoſition and contradiction: But inſtead of this, they are told a plain ſtory of the life and miracles of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and of his dying upon the Croſs, and riſing from the dead, and aſcending into heaven; and a few plain precepts of life; and all this deliver'd without any ornaments of art, or inſinuation of eloquence, to gain the favour and applauſe of thoſe to whom they related theſe things.

But now, this truly conſider'd is ſo far from being any real objection againſt the chriſtian doctrine, that it is one of the greateſt commendations that can be given of it: For matter of fact ought to be related in the moſt plain and ſimple and unaffected manner; and the leſs art and eloquence is uſed in the telling of a ſtory, the more likely it is to gain belief. And as for our Saviour's precepts, how plain ſoever they might be, I am ſure they are a collection of the moſt excellent and reaſonable rules of a good life, and the freeſt from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in the world. And can any thing be more worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him, than ſo plain and uſeful a doctrine as this? The language of law is not wont to be fine and perſuaſive, but ſhort, and plain, and full of authority. Thus it is among men: And ſurely it is much fitter for God to ſpeak thus to men, than for men to one another.

Thirdly, It is objected, That the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apoſtles wanted demonſtration; they ſeemed to impoſe too much upon the underſtandings of men, and to deliver things too magiſterially, not demonſtrating things from intrinſical arguments, but requiring belief and aſſent without proof.

This the Apoſtle St. *Paul* readily acknowledgeth, that in preaching the Goſpel to the world, they did not proceed in the way of the heathen Orators and Philoſophers, 1 *Cor.* ii. 4. *My ſpeech and my preaching was not in the enticing words of man's wiſdom: but in demonſtration of the Spirit and of power*; that is, they did not go in the way of human eloquence and demonſtration: but yet their doctrine did not want its evidence and demonſtration, though of another kind. They did not go about to bewitch men by eloquence, nor to entangle their minds by ſubtle reaſonings, the force of which very few are capable of: But they offered to men a ſenſible proof and demonſtration of the truth of what they delivered, in thoſe ſtrange and miraculous operations, to which they were enabled by the Holy Ghoſt. And this was a ſenſible evidence, even to the meaneſt capacity, of a divine Aſſiſtance going along with them, and giving teſtimony to them. I appeal to any man, whether the reſurrection of *Jeſus Chriſt* from the dead, and his aſcending into heaven, be not a clearer demonſtration of another life after this, and more level to the capacities of all mankind, than the fineſt and ſubtileſt arguments that can be drawn from the immaterial nature of the ſoul, its power of reflection upon itſelf, and independency upon the body as to ſome of its operations; which yet are ſome of the chiefeſt arguments that philoſophy affords, to prove the immortality of our ſouls.

Fourthly, The *heathens* objected, that the low and mean condition of our Saviour was unſuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by God to be a teacher and reformer of the world. This to the *heathen philoſophers* did not only appear unreaſonable, but even ridiculous. So St. *Paul* tells us, 1 *Cor.* i. 23. *We preach Chriſt crucified, to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*: To think that a man who appeared in ſuch mean circumſtances, ſhould be fit to reform the world; and one who himſelf was put to death, ſhould be relied upon for life and immortality.

This objection I have heretofore conſidered at large, and therefore ſhall now ſpeak but very briefly to it.

Beſides thoſe excellent reaſons and ends which the Scripture aſſigns of our Saviour's humiliation: as that he might be a teacher and example to us; that he might make expiation for our ſins; that by ſuffering himſelf he might learn to commiſerate us; that *by death he might deſtroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and might deliver thoſe who through fear of death were all their lives ſubject to bondage*; I ſay, beſides theſe, it was of great uſe that he ſhould live in ſo mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride, and vanity, and fantaſtry of the world; and to convince men of theſe two great truths, That God may love thoſe whom he afflicts; and, That men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented in the midſt of poverty, and reproach, and ſuffering. Had our bleſſed Saviour been a great temporal prince, his influence and example might poſſibly have made more hypocrites and ſervile converts; but would not have perſuaed men one jot more to be inwardly good and virtuous. The great arguments which muſt do that, muſt be fetch'd, not from the pomp and proſperity of this world, but from the eternal happineſs and miſery of the other. Beſides, had he appear'd in any great power and ſplendor, the chriſtian religion could not have been ſo clearly acquitted from the ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign, which would have been a far greater objection againſt it, than this which I am now ſpeaking to.

Add to all this, that the wiſeſt of the *heathen philoſophers* did teach, that worldly greatneſs and power are not to be admired, but deſpiſed by a truly wiſe man; that men may be virtuous and good, and dearly beloved of God, and yet be liable to great miſeries and ſufferings; and that whoever ſuffers unjuſtly, and bears it patiently, gives the greateſt teſtimony to goodneſs, and does moſt effectually recommend virtue to the world; that a good man under the hardeſt circumſtances of miſery, and reproach, and ſuffering, is the fitteſt perſon of all other to be the miniſter, and Apoſtle, and preacher of God to mankind: And ſurely they who ſay ſuch things (which the *heathens* have done) had no reaſon to object to our bleſſed Saviour his low and ſuffering condition.

As to that part of the objection, that he who promis'd immortality to others could not ſave himſelf from death and ſuffering: conſidering that he who was put to death, reſcu'd himſelf from the power of the grave; it is ſo far from being ridiculous, that nothing can be more reaſonable than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who by riſing from the grave, and conquering death, gave a plain demonſtration that he was able to make good what he promiſed.

I have done with the exceptions which were made againſt our Saviour and his doctrine at their firſt appearance in the world. I proceed in the

II. Place to conſider the prejudices and objections which men at this day do more eſpecially inſiſt upon, againſt our Saviour and his religion: And they are many.

Firſt, Some that relate to the incarnation of our Saviour.

Secondly, To the time of his appearance.

Thirdly, That we have not now ſufficient evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this diſtance, we have not, nor can be expected to have, ſufficient aſſurance.

Fourthly, That the terms of it ſeem very hard, and to lay too great reſtraints upon human nature.

Fifthly, That it is apt to diſpirit men, and to break the vigour and courage of their minds.

Sixthly, The diviſions and factions that are among Chriſtians.

Seventhly, The wicked lives of the greateſt part of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. In anſwer to all which I do not propoſe to ſay all that may be ſaid, but as briefly as I can to offer ſo much, as may, if not give full ſatisfaction, yet be ſufficient to break the force of them, and to free the minds of men from any great perplexity about them.

As to the *firſt*, which relates to the incarnation of our Saviour; and the *ſecond*, to the time of his appearance; I know that theſe and moſt of the reſt I have mention'd, were urg'd by the heathen againſt Chriſtianity: But they are now more eſpecially inſiſted upon both by the ſecret and open enemies of our religion.

The objections againſt his incarnation I have elſewhere conſider'd. And therefore ſhall proceed to the next, *viz.* John i. 14. Serm. III.

Secondly, As to the time of our Saviour's appearance, it is objected, if he be the only way and means of ſalvation, why did he come no ſooner into the world; but ſuffer mankind to remain ſo long without any hopes or means of being ſaved? This was objected by *Porphyry* of old, and ſtill ſticks in the minds of men. To this I anſwer,

1. It is not fit for Creatures to call their Creator to too ſtrict an account of his actions. Goodneſs is free, and may act when and how it pleaſeth; and *as God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy*, ſo he may have mercy at what time he pleaſeth, and is not bound to give us an account of his matters. This is much like the objection of the Atheiſt againſt the being of God; That if there were ſuch an infinite and eternal being he would ſurely have made the world ſooner, and not have been without all employment for ſo long a duration; ſuch another objection is this againſt our Saviour, that if he had been the Son of God, he would have begun this great and merciful work of the redemption of mankind ſooner, and not have delay'd it ſo long, and ſuffer'd mankind to periſh for four thouſand years together.

But it ſeems in the one as well as the other, God took his own time, and he beſt knew what time was fitteſt. The Scripture tells us, that *in the fulneſs of time, God ſent his Son:* when things were ripe for it, and all things accompliſht that God thought requiſite in order to it. In judging of the actions of our earthly governors, thoſe who are at a diſtance from their counſels, what conjectures ſoever they may make of the reaſons of them, will nevertheleſs, if they have that reſpect for their wiſdom which they ought, believe, that how ſtrange ſoever ſome of their actions may ſeem, yet they were done upon good reaſon, and that they themſelves, if they knew the ſecrets of their counſels, ſhould think ſo. Much more do we owe that reverence to the infinite wiſdom of God, to believe that the counſels of his will are grounded upon very good reaſon, tho' we do not ſee many times what it is.

2. It is not true that the world was wholly deſtitute of a way and means of ſalvation before our Saviour's coming. Before the law of *Moſes* was given, men were capable of being received to the mercy and favour of God, upon their obedience to the law of nature, and their ſincere repentance for the violation of it, by virtue of *the Lamb that was ſlain from the foundation of the world.* Men were ſaved by Chriſt both before and under the law, without any particular and expreſs knowledge of him. There were good men in other nations, as well as among the *Jews*, as *Job*, and his friends alſo, ſeem to have been. In all ages of the world, and *in every nation, they that feared God and wrought righteouſneſs were accepted of him.* The ſacrifice of Chriſt, which is the meritorious cauſe of the ſalvation of mankind, looks back as well as forward; and God was reconcileable to men, and their ſins were pardon'd, by virtue of this great propitiation that was to be made. In which ſenſe perhaps it is, that Chriſt is ſaid to be *the Lamb ſlain from the foundation of the world, Heb.* ix. 25, 26. The Apoſtle intimates to us, that if this ſacrifice, which was offered in the laſt ages of the world, had not been available in former ages, *Chriſt muſt have often ſuffer'd ſince the foundation of the world: But now hath he appeared once in the concluſion of the ages, to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf.*

3. He did appear at that time in which the world ſtood moſt in need of him; when the whole world, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were ſunk into the greateſt degeneracy both in opinion and practice, and the condition of mankind ſeem'd to be even deſperate and paſt remedy. This was the needful time, when it was moſt ſeaſonable for this great phyſician to come, and ſhew his pity and his ſkill in our recovery. God could have ſent his Son many ages before; but he thought fit to try other ways firſt, and to reſerve this powerful remedy to the laſt; *laſt of all he ſent his Son.*

4. The time of our Saviour's appearing was of all ages of the world the fitteſt ſeaſon for his coming; whether we conſider,

1. That the world was at that time beſt prepared and diſpoſed for receiving the chriſtian religion: Or,

2. That this was the fitteſt ſeaſon that ever had been, for the eaſy diffuſing and propagating of this religion. I aſſign theſe reaſons as tending to give men ſome ſatisfaction, why this great bleſſing was delay'd ſo long; it being rather an argument of wiſdom and goodneſs, than of the want of either, to defer things to that time, in which they are moſt likely to have their effect. Not but that perhaps other and better reaſons may be given. To be ſure God had very good reaſons for this diſpenſation, whether we can hit upon them or not. In the mean time theſe ſeem not to be altogether inconſiderable:

1. That the world was at that time beſt prepared and diſpoſed for receiving the chriſtian religion. All the while our Saviour's coming was delay'd, God's providence was diſpoſing things for it, and training up mankind for the entertaining of this great bleſſing. The *Jewiſh* religion was always very burthenſome, but much more ſo towards the expiration of the *Jewiſh* ſtate, partly by the intolerable multitude of external obſervances, which were daily multiplied upon them, under pretence of traditions from their fathers; and partly by reaſon of their ſubjection to the *Romans*, which made the exerciſe of their religion in many reſpects more difficult.

And the heathen world was in a very good meaſure prepared for Chriſtianity, by being civiliz'd. About the time of our Saviour's coming into the world, philoſophy and learning had been ſo diffus'd by the *Roman* conqueſts, as had brought a great part of the world from barbariſm to civility. Beſides, that their philoſophy had this effect upon men, to refine their reaſon, and in a good degree to detect the follies of the heathen idolatry and ſuperſtition.

'Tis true indeed learning and philoſophy flouriſh'd a great while before, in the time of the *Grecian* Empire, and perhaps before that in ſome other nations; and the conqueſts of the *Grecians* were very ſpeedy and of vaſt extent: But yet they were neither ſo univerſal, nor ſo well ſettled; nor did they propagate their philoſophy and civility together with their conqueſts, as the *Romans* did. So that there was no age of the world, wherein mankind were ſo generally prepared and diſpoſed for the receiving of the Goſpel, as that wherein our Saviour appeared.

2. This was likewiſe the fitteſt ſeaſon for the eaſy diffuſing and propagating of the chriſtian religion. The *Romans,* together with their conqueſts, did very much propagate their language, which made the ways of communication far more eaſy; and by the long and frequent correſpondence of the ſeveral parts of that empire one with another, the ways of travel and paſſage from one country to another were more ready and open. So that no age can be inſtanc'd, in all reſpects ſo convenient for the ſpeedy propagating of a new religion, as that wherein our Saviour appear'd, *viz.* when the *Roman* empire was at its height. And it was very agreeable to the goodneſs and wiſdom of the divine providence, that the braveſt and moſt virtuous people in the world (infinitely beyond either the *Perſians* or *Grecians*) ſhould be choſen by God, as one of the chiefeſt means for the ſpreading of the beſt and moſt perfect revelation that ever God made to the world.

Thirdly, It is objected, That we have not now ſufficient evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which at this diſtance we have not, nor can be ſuppoſed to have, ſufficient aſſurance. To this I anſwer,

1. That men not only may have, but have an undoubted aſſurance of matters of fact, ancienter than theſe we are ſpeaking of; and the diſtance of them from our times creates no manner of ſcruple in the minds of men concerning them. That there was ſuch a man as *Alexander* the Great, and that he conquer'd *Darius* and the *Perſians*; That *Julius Cæſar* invaded our nation, and in ſome meaſure ſubdued it; and that he overcame *Pompey* in the battel of *Pharſalia*; and innumerable other things which I might inſtance in, that were done before our Saviour's time, are firmly believ'd without any manner of doubt and ſcruple by mankind, notwithſtanding they were done ſo long ago. So that antient matters of fact are capable of clear evidence, and we may have ſufficient aſſurance of them. And where there is equal evidence, if we do not give equal belief, the fault is not in the argument, but in the paſſion or prejudice of thoſe to whom it is propoſed.

2. We have every whit as great aſſurance, (nay greater if it can, or needed to be) of the matters upon which the proof of Chriſtianity relies, as of thoſe which I have mention'd. The matters of fact, upon which the truth of Chriſtianity relies, are, That there was ſuch a perſon as *Jeſus Chriſt*; that he wrought ſuch miracles; that he was put to death at *Jeruſalem* under *Pontius Pilate*; that he roſe again from the dead, and was viſibly taken up into heaven; that he beſtowed miraculous gifts and powers upon the Apoſtles, to make them competent witneſſes of his reſurrection, and of the truth of that doctrine, which they publiſhed in his name; that accordingly they preach'd the Goſpel to the world, and in a ſhort ſpace without any human advantages did propagate it, and gain entertainment for it in moſt parts of the then known world.

Now theſe matters of fact have the ſame teſtimony of hiſtories, wrote in thoſe times, and conveyed down to us, by as general and uncontrouled a tradition, as the conqueſts of *Alexander* and *Julius Cæſar*. So that if we do not afford equal belief to them, it is a ſign that we have ſome prejudice or intereſt againſt the one more than againſt the other, though the evidence for both be equal. Nay, I go farther, that the evidence for theſe things, which are the foundation of Chriſtianity, is ſo much the greater, becauſe that which depended upon it was of far greater concernment to the world, and conſequently mankind were more obliged to ſearch more narrowly into it.

For our Saviour's life, and death, and reſurrection, we have the teſtimony of a great number of eye-witneſſes, who have wrote the hiſtory of theſe things. And though they were truly extraordinary perſons, and gave teſtimony to themſelves by miracles; yet at preſent I deſire no more, but that they be looked upon, as knowing and honeſt relators of what they heard and ſaw; and that the ſame credit be given to them, which we give to *Livy*, and *Arrian*, and *Q. Curtius*, for plain events, and matters of fact.

But yet I muſt add withal, that beſides the miracles which they wrought, they gave greater teſtimony of their integrity, than any hiſtorian in the world ever did. For they willingly ſuffer'd the greateſt perſecution and torment, yea and death itſelf, in confirmation of the truth of what they deliver'd. And for the propagating of the chriſtian religion through ſo great a part of the world, it is evident by the effect beyond all denial.

So that for the matters of fact, upon which the truth of Chriſtianity does depend, here is greater and more advantageous evidence of hiſtory, than for any other matter of equal antiquity whatſoever.

3. As to the ſubſtance of theſe matters of fact, we have the concurring teſtimony of the greateſt enemies of the chriſtian religion. That there were ſuch perſons as our Saviour and his Apoſtles, that they preached ſuch a doctrine, that they wrought ſuch miracles; for this we have the acknowledgment of the *Jews*, and the teſtimony of the Heathen hiſtorians, and particularly of *Celſus*, and *Porphyry*, and *Julian*, who were the particular and moſt learned adverſaries of the chriſtian religion. So that as to the matters of fact, there is no objection againſt them, whatever uſe we may make of them, or whatever conſequences we may draw from them. And I preſume it agreed by all objectors, that if theſe matters of fact be true, they are a ſufficient foundation of the truth of our religion, and we are very unequal to our religion, if we make a doubt of theſe things, which the greateſt enemies of Chriſtianity never had the face to deny.

4. And beſides all this, to recompenſe the diſadvantage which we have of thoſe who ſaw the miracles of our Saviour and his Apoſtles, we have the *teſtimonium rei*, the evidence of the effects of theſe things to confirm our belief of them; and this is an advantage which the firſt ages of Chriſtianity could not have. We ſee our Saviour's predictions of the ſucceſs of his religion in the world, in the propagating and eſtabliſhing of it fully accompliſh'd, notwithſtanding the fierce oppoſition and reſiſtance that was made againſt it by the greateſt powers of the world. We ſee the diſperſion of the *Jews* in all nations, and the miſery and contempt which they every where ſuffer; and that now for above ſixteen hundred years, they have continued a diſtinct people, and a ſpectacle of the divine juſtice and ſeverity, for rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, and for a laſting and ſtanding teſtimony of the truth of our Saviour's prediction, and of the chriſtian religion.

So that though we live at this diſtance from the firſt riſe and beginning of Chriſtianity; yet we have the relation of thoſe things, which give confirmation to it, conveyed down to us in as credible a manner, as any ancient matter of fact ever was; and the effects of things remaining to this day, do give teſtimony of the truth of it.

Fourthly, It is objected, That the terms of Chriſtianity ſeem very hard, and to lay too great reſtraints upon human nature. It commands us to mortify our luſts, and ſubdue our paſſions, and *deny ungodlineſs, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly and godly in this preſent world: to be holy in all manner of converſation*; *to have reſpect to whatever things are honeſt, and true, and juſt, and virtuous, and of good report*; *and to deny our ſelves*; and to part with the deareſt enjoyments of this life, *yea and with life itſelf, for the ſake of Chriſt, and his goſpel.* Now theſe ſeem to be very hard terms; to forego all the preſent pleaſures and enjoyments of this life, in hopes of a future happineſs which we are leſs aſſur'd of.

To this I anſwer,

1. That this is a greater objection againſt religion in general, than the chriſtian religion. For natural religion requires of us all the main duties that Chriſtianity does, and gives us far leſs aſſurance of the reward of our obedience. Natural religion requires piety, and juſtice, and charity, the due government of our appetites and paſſions, as well as Chriſtianity does, but does not diſcover to us the rewards of another world, by many degrees ſo clearly, as our Lord and Saviour, who hath *brought life and immortality to light by the goſpel*; and by his reſurrection from the dead, and aſcenſion into heaven, hath given us full aſſurance of another life after this, and of a glorious immortality. So that though we have not, nor can have the evidence of ſenſe, for a future ſtate, yet we have all the rational evidence for it, that can be wiſh'd or expected; and much more than men have for thoſe adventures of their lives and fortunes, which they frequently make in this world, and think themſelves reaſonable in ſo doing.

2. The reſtraints which Chriſtianity lays upon men, are in the judgment of mankind ſo far from being an objection againſt it, that they are highly to the commendation of it. Nay, it were the greateſt objection that could be againſt our religion, if it did ſet us at liberty from thoſe reſtraints. What can be more to the credit of any religion, than

to command men to be juſt, and charitable, and peaceable? and what more to the advantage of the profeſſors of it? and on the contrary, what can reflect more upon any religion, than to indulge and allow men in any vice contrary to theſe? it ſhews men are glad to make any thing an objection againſt Chriſtianity, when they lay hold of that, which if it had been otherwiſe, they would have made ten times more clamour againſt it for the contrary.

3. As for moſt of thoſe reſtraints which Chriſtianity lays upon us, they are of that nature, ſo much both for our private and publick advantage, that ſetting aſide all conſiderations of religion, and of the rewards and puniſhments of another life, they are really good for us, and if God had not laid them upon us, we ought in reaſon, in order to our temporal benefit and advantage, to have laid them upon our ſelves. If there were no religion, I know men would not have ſuch ſtrong and forcible obligations to theſe duties: but yet I ſay, though there were no religion, it were good for men, in order to temporal ends, to their health, and quiet, and reputation, and ſafety, in a word, to the private and publick proſperity of mankind, that men ſhould be temperate, and chaſte, and juſt, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind, and obliging to one another, rather than the contrary. So that religion does not create thoſe reſtraints arbitrarily, but requires thoſe things of us, which our reaſon, and a regard to our advantage, which the neceſſity and conveniency of the things themſelves, without any conſideration of religion, would in moſt caſes urge us to.

4. As to the caſe of perſecution for religion; beſides that it does not now happen ſo frequently as it did in the beginning of Chriſtianity, nay very ſeldom in compariſon, if all things be conſider'd, it cannot be thought unreaſonable; both becauſe religion offers to us, in conſideration of our preſent ſufferings, a happineſs unſpeakably greater than that which we forego for the ſake of religon; and becauſe when it happens, God does extraordinarily enable men to go through it with courage and comfort, as we ſee in the examples of the primitive Chriſtians, who in great numbers of all tempers and ages, did voluntarily chuſe to give up themſelves to theſe ſufferings, when there was no neceſſity laid upon them, but fair terms of retreat were offer'd to them by their enemies. It is one thing when a man ſuffers by the law, and cannot help it; and another thing when men may avoid ſuffering. In the former caſe men ſubmit to neceſſity, and bear it as well as they can; in the latter caſe, if men ſuffer, it is a ſign they firmly believe the reward of it; and if they ſuffer chearfully, and with joy, as moſt of the martyrs did, it is a plain evidence that God affords them extraordinary ſupport in their ſufferings; and then the caſe is not very hard, when religion puts them upon nothing but what it gives them cauſe, and enables them, to rejoice in the doing of it.

Fifthly, It is objected, that the chriſtian religon is apt to diſpirit men, and to break the courage and vigour of their minds, by the precepts of patience, and humility, and meekneſs, and forgiving injures, and the like. This Objection hath made a great noiſe in the world, and hath been urged by men of great reputation, and a deep inſight into the tempers of men, and affairs of the world. It is ſaid to be particularly inſiſted upon by *Machiavel*, and very likely it may; though I think that elſewhere he is pleaſed to ſpeak with terms of reſpect, not only of religion in general, but likewiſe of the chriſtian religion; and (which ſeems very much to contradict the other) he ſays in the firſt book of his diſcourſes upon *Livy*, (Ch. 11.) that the greatneſs and ſucceſs of *Rome* is chiefly to be aſcribed to their piety and religion; and that *Rome* was more indebted to *Numa Pompilius* for ſettling religion among them, than to *Romulus* the founder of their ſtate; and the reaſon he gives is much to our preſent purpoſe; for, ſays he, without religion there can be no military diſcipline, religion being the foundation of good laws and good diſcipline. And particularly he commends the *Samnites*, who betook themſelves to religion, as their laſt and beſt remedy to make men courageous, nothing being more apt to raiſe mens ſpirits than religion.

But howſoever this objection be, I dare appeal both to reaſon and experience for the confutation of it.

1. To reaſon, and that as to theſe *two* things.

(1) That the chriſtian religion is apt to plant in the minds of men principles of the greateſt reſolution and trueſt courage. It teacheth men upon the beſt and moſt rational grounds to deſpiſe dangers, yea and death it ſelf, the greateſt and moſt formidable evil in this world; and this principle is likely to inſpire men with the greateſt courage; for what need he fear any thing in this world, who fears not death, after which there is

nothing in this world to be feared? And this the chriſtian religion does, by giving men the aſſurance of another life, and a happineſs infinitely greater than any is to be enjoyed in this world. And in order to the ſecuring of this happineſs, it teacheth men to be holy, and juſt, and to exerciſe a good conſcience both toward God and man, which is the only way to free a man from all inward and tormenting fears of what may happen to him after death. *This makes the righteous man* to be (as *Solomon* ſays) *bold as a lion.* Nothing renders a man more undaunted as to death, and the conſequences of it, than the peace of his own mind; for a man not to be conſcious to himſelf of having wilfully diſpleaſed him, who alone can make us happy or miſerable in the other world. So that a good man, being ſecure of the favour of God, may upon that account reaſonably hope for a greater happineſs after death than other men: whereas a bad man, if he be ſober, and have his ſenſes awakened to a ſerious conſideration of things, cannot but be afraid to die; and be extremely anxious and ſollicitous what will become of him in another world. And ſurely it would make the ſtouteſt man breathing afraid to venture upon death, when he ſees hell beyond it. Poſſibly there may be ſome monſters of men who may have ſo far ſuppreſs'd the ſenſe of religion, and ſtupified their conſciences, as in a good meaſure to have conquer'd the fears of death, and of the conſequences of it. But this happens but to a very few, as the Poet tells us in the perſon of an *Epicurean*,

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoſcere cauſas,
Atque metus omnes & inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, ſtrepitumque Acherontis avari.

There are very few that attain to this temper, and but at ſome times. So that if vice and wickedneſs do generally break the firmneſs of mens ſpirits; it remains, that nothing but religion can generally give men courage againſt death. And this the chriſtian religion does eminently to thoſe who live according to it; our bleſſed Saviour having delivered us from the fear of death, by conquering death for us, and giving us aſſurance of the glorious rewards of another life.

(2.) Meekneſs, and patience, and humility, and modeſty, and ſuch virtues of Chriſtianity, do not in reaſon tend to diſpirit men, and break their true courage, but only to regulate it, and take away the fierceneſs and brutiſhneſs of it. This we ſee in experience, that men of the trueſt courage have many times leaſt of pride and inſolence, of paſſion and fierceneſs. Thoſe who are better bred, are commonly of more gentle and civil diſpoſitions: but yet they do not therefore want true courage, though they have not the roughneſs and fool-hardineſs of men of ruder breeding. So in a true Chriſtian, courage and greatneſs of mind, is very conſiſtent with meekneſs, and patience, and humility. Not that all good men are very courageous; there is much of this in the natural temper of men, which religion does not quite alter. But that which I am concerned to maintain is, that Chriſtianity is no hindrance to mens courage, and that *cæteris paribus*, ſuppoſing men of equal tempers, no man hath ſo much reaſon to be valiant, as he that hath a good conſcience; I do not mean a bluſtering, and boiſterous, and raſh courage; but a ſober, and calm, and fixt valour.

2. I appeal to experience for the truth of this. Did ever greater courage and contempt of death appear in all ages, and ſexes, and conditions of men, than in the primitive martyrs? were any of the heathen ſoldiers comparable to the chriſtian *legion*, for reſolution and courage, even the *Heathens* themſelves being judges? The religion of *Mahomet* ſeems to be contrived to inſpire men with fierceneſs and deſperateneſs of reſolution, and yet I do not find, but that generally where there hath been any equality for number, the Chriſtians have been ſuperior to them in valour, and have given greater inſtances of reſolution and courage, than the *Turks* have done. So that I wonder upon what grounds this objection hath been taken up againſt Chriſtianity, when there is nothing either in the nature of this religion, or from the experience of the world, to give any tolerable countenance to it. And ſurely the beſt way to know what effect any religion is likely to have upon the minds of men, is to conſider what effects it hath had in the conſtant experience of mankind. There remain the other two objections, which I mention'dbut I muſt reſerve them to another opportunity.

SERMON LXV.

The Second Sermon on this text.

The Prejudices againſt *Jeſus* and his Religion conſider'd.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.

FROM theſe words I propoſed to conſider theſe *two* things:

I. The prejudices and objections which the world at firſt had, and many ſtill have, againſt our bleſſed Saviour and his religion.

II. That it is a great happineſs to eſcape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion.

I have conſider'd thoſe objections which the *Jews* and *heathen Philoſophers* made againſt our Saviour and his religion: and,

II. Thoſe which at this day are inſiſted upon by the ſecret and open enemies of our religion. And I mention'd *ſeven*, the *two* laſt of which I ſhall now ſpeak to.

Sixthly, It is objected, that there are many diviſions and factions among Chriſtians. This I confeſs is a great reproach and ſcandal to our religion; but no ſufficient argument againſt it. And,

1. To leſſen and abate the force of this objection, it is to be conſider'd, that a very great part of the diviſions, that are among thoſe that are call'd Chriſtians, are about things that do not concern the eſſentials of Chriſtianity, and therefore they are no argument that Chriſtianity is not true, becauſe they bring no ſuſpicion of doubt and uncertainty upon the fundamentals of Chriſtianity, which all agree in, though they differ in other things. 'Tis true indeed they are very undecent, and contrary to the nature and precepts of the chriſtian religion, which above any religion in the world does ſtrictly require love and unity. They take off much from the ſtrength and beauty of our religion: but do by no means deſtroy the truth of it.

2. How many and great ſoever they may be, yet they can with no colour of reaſon be imputed to the chriſtian religion, as giving any cauſe or encouragement to them, however by accident it may be the occaſion of them. For no man doubts but that the beſt thing in the world may be perverted by bad men, and made an occaſion of a great deal of miſchief in the world, and yet be very innocent of all that miſchief. No man can deny but that Chriſtianity does ſtrictly enjoin love, and peace, and unity among all the members of that profeſſion; and ſo far as Chriſtians are factious and unpeaceable, ſo far they are no Chriſtians. So that a man may as well except againſt philoſophy, becauſe of the differences that were among the Philoſophers, and ſay there was no truth among them, becauſe they were not all agreed in all things, as call the truth of Chriſtianity in queſtion, for the Differences that are among Chriſtians. Nay, a man might every whit as well except againſt laws and government; becauſe nowithſtanding them, there are frequent ſeditions, and rebellions, infinite ſuits and controverſies occaſion'd even by the very laws: but no man was ever ſo unreaſonable as to think this a good reaſon againſt laws and government.

3. The diviſions of Chriſtians are ſo far from being an argument againſt Chriſtianity, that on the contrary, they are an argument that men ſhould embrace Chriſtianity more heartily, and make more conſcience of obeying the precepts of it. And if they did this, the greateſt part of thoſe contentions and uncharitable animoſities which are among them would preſently ceaſe. If the chriſtian religion were truly entertained, and men did ſeriouſly mind the precepts of it, and give up themſelves to the obedience of its laws, differences would not be eaſily commenced, nor ſo vehemently proſecuted, nor ſo pertinaciouſly

tinaciouſly continued in, as they are. Men would not, upon every ſlight reaſon, and little doubt and ſcruple, rend and tear the body of Chriſt in pieces, and ſeparate themſelves from the communion of the church they live in, and in which they were baptized and received their Chriſtianity.

If men ſeriouſly conſider'd, and truly underſtood what they do, when they divide the church of Chriſt upon little ſcruples and pretences, they would hardly be able to think themſelves Chriſtians, whilſt they continued in theſe unchriſtian and uncharitable practices.

If men would but be, or do what Chriſtianity requires, there would be no occaſion for this objection; and if men will not, chriſtian religion is not to be blamed for it, but thoſe that act ſo contrary to the plain precepts and directions of it. I proceed to the

Seventh and *laſt* objection, the vicious and wicked lives of a great part of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. This is a heavy objection indeed, and ſuch an one, that though we may juſtly be aſhamed to own the truth of it, yet can we not have the face to deny it. 'Tis ſo ſad a truth, that it is enough to confound us, and to fill all our faces with ſhame and bluſhing; but yet it is an objection not ſo ſtrong againſt Chriſtianity, as it is ſhameful to Chriſtians. And notwithſtanding the utmoſt force of it, we have no cauſe to be aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt; but the goſpel of Chriſt may juſtly be aſhamed of us. For whatever we be, *the goſpel of Chriſt is the power of God unto ſalvation.* The natural tendency of it is to reform and ſave men, and *the wrath of God is therein revealed againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, however they may detain the truths of God in unrighteouſneſs*, and not ſuffer them to have their due and proper influence upon their hearts and lives.

But that I may give a more clear and particular anſwer to it, I deſire you to attend to theſe following conſiderations.

1. It cannot be denied, but that Chriſtianity hath had once very great and marvelous effects upon the hearts and lives of men. And for this I appeal to the lives and manners of the primitive Chriſtians, for which we have not only the teſtimony of our own books and writers, but even of the adverſaries of our religion. What reformation Chriſtianity at firſt wrought in the manners of men, we have clear and full teſtimony, from what the Apoſtles wrote concerning the ſeveral churches which they planted in ſeveral parts of the world. What hearty unity and affection there was among Chriſtians; even to that degree, as to make men bring in their private eſtates and poſſeſſions for the common ſupport of their brethren, we may read in the hiſtory of the *Acts* of the Apoſtles. The city of *Corinth*, by the account which *Strabo* gives of it, was a very vicious and luxurious place, as moſt in the world; and yet we ſee by St. *Paul*, what a ſtrange reformation the chriſtian religion made in the lives and manners of many of them; 1 *Cor.* vi. 9, 10, 11. *Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. And ſuch were ſome of you: but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified, in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the Spirit of our God.* And ſurely it is no ſmall matter to reclaim men from ſuch a profligate courſe of life. The Apoſtle inſtanceth in crimes and vices of the firſt rate, from which yet he tells us many were cleanſed and purified *by the name of the Lord Jeſus, and the Spirit of God*; that is, by the power and efficacy of the chriſtian doctrine, together with the co-operation of God's holy Spirit.

After the Apoſtles, the ancient fathers, in their apologies for Chriſtianity, give us a large account of the great power and efficacy of the chriſtian doctrine upon the lives and manners of men. *Tertullian* tells the *Roman* governors, that their priſons were full of malefactors, committed for ſeveral crimes; but they were all *Heathens. De veſtris ſemper æſtuat carcer, their priſons were thronged with criminals of their own religion*; but there were no Chriſtians to be found committed there for ſuch crimes; *Nemo illic Chriſtianus, niſi hoc tantùm*, &c. *There were no Chriſtians in their priſons, but only upon account of their religion.* Or if there were any malefactors that had been Chriſtians, they left their religion when they fell into thoſe enormities. And afterwards he adds, that if Chriſtians were irregular in their lives, they were no longer accounted Chriſtians, but were baniſh'd from their communion as unworthy of it. And they appealed to the *Heathens*, what a ſudden and ſtrange change Chriſtianity had made in ſeveral of the moſt lewd, and vicious, and debauched perſons, and what a viſible reformation there preſently appeared in the lives of the worſt of men, after they had once entertained the chriſtian doctrine.

And theſe teſtimonies are ſo much the ſtronger, becauſe they are publick appeals to our adverſaries, which it is not likely they who were ſo perſecuted and hated as the Chriſtians were, would have had the confidence to have made, if they had not been notoriouſly true, even their enemies themſelves being judges.

And that they were ſo, we have the confeſſion of the *Heathens* themſelves. I ſhall produce two remarkable teſtimonies to this purpoſe, and one of them from the pen of one of the bittereſt enemies that the chriſtian religion ever had.

Pliny, in his epiſtle to *Trajan* the Emperor, gives him an account, "That having "examined the Chriſtians, ſetting aſide the ſuperſtition of their way, he could find no "fault; and that this was the ſum of their error, that they were wont to meet before "day, and ſing a hymn to Chriſt, and to bind themſelves by a ſolemn oath or ſacrament, "not to any wicked purpoſe, but not to ſteal, nor rob, nor commit adultery, nor break "their faith, nor detain the pledge." So that it ſeems the ſum of their error was, to oblige themſelves in the ſtricteſt manner againſt the greateſt vices and crimes. Which methinks is a great teſtimony from an enemy and a judge, one who would have been ready to diſcover their faults, and had opportunity of enquiring into them.

My other witneſs is *Julian* the Emperor and Apoſtate, who in one of his epiſtles tells us, "The Chriſtians did ſeverely puniſh ſedition and impiety." And afterwards exhorting the *heathen* prieſts to all offices of humanity, and eſpecially alms towards the poor; he tells them, they ought to be more careful in this particular, and to mend this fault; *becauſe* (ſays he) *the Galileans taking advantage of our neglect in this kind, have very much ſtrengthen'd their impiety* (for ſo he calls their religion) *by being very intent upon theſe offices, and exemplary in their charity to the poor, whereby they gained many over to them.*

And in his 49th Epiſtle to *Arſacius* the high-prieſt of *Galatia*, he recommends to him, among other means for the advancement of Paganiſm, the building of hoſpitals, and great liberality to the poor, not only of their own religion, but others. *For*, ſays he, *it is a ſhame that the impious Galileans ſhould not only maintain their own poor, but ours alſo; wherefore let us not ſuffer them to outdo us in this virtue.* Nothing but the force of truth could have extorted ſo full an acknowledgment of the great humanity and charity of the Chriſtians, from ſo bitter an enemy of our religion as *Julian* was. If he owned it, we may be ſure it was very great and exemplary.

So that you ſee that the chriſtian religion had a very great power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men when it firſt appeared in the world. And the true ſpirit and genius of any religion, the force of any inſtitution, is beſt ſeen in the primitive effects of it; before it be weaken'd and diſpirited by thoſe corruptions, which in time are apt to inſinuate themſelves into the beſt things. For all laws and inſtitutions are commonly more vigorous, and have greater effects at firſt, than afterwards; and the beſt things are apt in time to degenerate, and to contract ſoil and ruſt. And it cannot in reaſon be expected otherwiſe. So that though it be a thing to be bewailed, and by the greateſt care and diligence to be reſiſted, yet it is not ſo extremely to be wonder'd at, if Chriſtianity, in the ſpace of ſixteen hundred years, hath abated much of its firſt ſtrength and vigor.

Eſpecially conſidering, that there were ſeveral circumſtances, that gave Chriſtianity mighty advantages at firſt, eſpecially the miraculous powers which did accompany the firſt publication of the goſpel; which muſt needs be full of conviction to thoſe who ſaw the wonderful effects of it: the extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men to diſpoſe them to the receiving of it: the perſecuted and ſuffering ſtate that Chriſtians were generally in, which made thoſe who embraced the profeſſion to be generally ſerious and in good earneſt in it, and kept up a continual heat and zeal in the minds of men for that religion which coſt them ſo dear, and for which they ſuffer'd ſo much: and the fury of their enemies againſt it, did naturally inflame their love and kindneſs to one another; nothing being a greater endearment among men, than common ſufferings in a common cauſe. So long as Chriſtians were not corrupted by ſecular intereſt, and by denying all for Chriſt were free from covetouſneſs and ambition, the great roots of all evil, the church of Chriſt, *though ſhe was black, yet ſhe was comely, and terrible as an army with banners*; ſhe was all this while in an excellent poſture to reſiſt the temptations, and fight againſt the vices and corruptions of the world; but after the world broke in upon the church, and Chriſtianity was countenanced by the powers of the world, and water'd with ſecular preferments and encouragements, no wonder if the *tares* began to grow up with the *wheat*: then *iniquity began to abound, and the love of many to grow cold.* When the ſun of proſperity began to ſhine upon the chriſtian profeſſion, then no wonder if the vermin bred and ſwarmed every where. When it grew creditable and advantageous for men to be Chriſtians, this muſt in all reaſon make a world of hypocrites, and counterfeit profeſſors.

Theſe things, I reckon, muſt in reaſon make a mighty difference between the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, and thoſe which have follow'd ſince; and no wonder if the real fruits and effects of religion in theſe ſeveral ſtates of Chriſtianity be very unequal. For proſperity and adverſity made a wide difference in this matter. The perſecution of any religion naturally makes the profeſſors of it real; and the proſperity of it does as naturally allure and draw in hypocrites. Beſides that even the beſt of men are more corrupted by proſperity than affliction.

But tho' Chriſtians were beſt under perſecution, yet God did not think fit always to continue them in that ſtate, becauſe he would not tempt them and tire them out with perpetual ſufferings; and after he had given the world a ſufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of the chriſtian religion, in maintaining and propagating itſelf in deſpite of all the violence and oppoſition of the world, ſufficient for ever to give reputation to it; he then thought good to leave it to be kept up by more human ways, and ſuch as offer leſs violence to the nature of a man. Being once eſtabliſh'd and ſettled in the world, and upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, God left it to be ſupported by more ordinary means; by pious education, and diligent inſtruction, and good laws and government, without miracles, and without perſecution, and without thoſe extraordinary and overpowering communications of his grace and ſpirit which he afforded to the firſt ages of Chriſtianity.

I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that men may ſee what effects Chriſtianity hath had upon the lives of men, by which we may ſee the proper nature and efficacy of it; and withal may not wonder ſo much that it hath not the ſame effects now. Though it be matter of great ſhame to us, that they are ſo vaſtly diſproportionable to what they were at firſt.

2. Though the diſproportion be very great between the effects of Chriſtianity at firſt, and what it hath now upon the lives of men; yet we ought not to deny, but it hath ſtill ſome good effects upon mankind; and it is our great ſhame and fault that it hath no better. If we will ſpeak juſtly of things, as to the general civility of life and manners, freedom from tyranny, and barbarouſneſs, and cruelty, and ſome other enormous vices; yea and as to the exemplary piety and virtue of a great numbers of particular perſons of ſeveral nations, there is no compariſon between the general ſtate of *Chriſtendom*, and the *Pagan* and *Mahometan* parts of the world. Next to Chriſtianity, and the law of *Moſes*, (which was confined to one nation) philoſophy was the moſt likely inſtrument to reform mankind that hath been in the world; and it had very conſiderable effects upon ſome particular perſons, both as to the rectifying of their opinions, and the reforming of their lives: but upon the generality of mankind it did very little in either of theſe reſpects, eſpecially as to the rectifying of the abſurd and impious opinions of the people concerning God, and their ſuperſtitious worſhip of the Deity. Whereas the chriſtian religion did univerſally, where-ever it came, ſet men free from thoſe groſs impieties and ſuperſtitions, and taught men to worſhip the only true God in a right manner.

Though we muſt confeſs, to the eternal reproach of the chriſtian religion, that the *Weſtern* church hath degenerated ſo far, that it ſeems to be in a great meaſure relaps'd into the ignorance and ſuperſtition of Paganiſm; out of which degeneracy, that God hath reſcued us, as we have infinite cauſe to adore his goodneſs, ſo we have all the reaſon in the world to dread and deteſt a return into this ſpiritual *Egypt*, this houſe of darkneſs and bondage, and the bringing of our necks again under *that yoke, which neither we nor our fathers, were able to bear.*

So that you ſee that there are ſtill very conſiderable effects of the chriſtian religion in the world, yea and I doubt not but in thoſe places where it is moſt corrupted and degenerated; becauſe they ſtill retain the eſſential doctrines of Chriſtianity, which have not quite loſt their force, notwithſtanding the many errors and corruptions that are mixt with them. And as God knows, and every man ſees it, that the generality of Chriſtians are very bad, notwithſtanding all the influence of that excellent religion which they profeſs; yet I think it is very evident, men would be much worſe without it. For though very many who have entertained the principles of Chriſtianity are very wicked in their lives; yet many are otherwiſe: and thoſe that are bad have this advantage by their religion, that it is in its nature apt to reduce and recover men from a wicked courſe, and ſometime does: whereas the caſe of thoſe perſons would have been deſperate, were it not for thoſe principles of religion which were implanted in them by chriſtian education; and tho' they were long ſuppreſs'd, yet did at laſt awaken them to a conſideration of their condition, and proved the happy means of their recovery.

3. I will not deny but there are ſome perſons as bad, nay perhaps worſe, that have been bred up in the chriſtian religion, than are commonly to be found in the darkneſs of Paganiſm; for the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt, and thoſe who have reſiſted ſo great a light as that of the goſpel is, are like to prove the moſt deſperately wicked of all others. There is nothing that men make worſe uſe of, than of light and liberty, two of the beſt and moſt pleaſant things in the world. Knowledge is many times abuſed to the worſt purpoſe, and liberty into licentiouſneſs and ſedition; and yet no man for all that thinks ignorance deſirable, or would wiſh a perpetual night and darkneſs to the world; and conclude from the inconveniences of abuſed liberty, that the beſt ſtate of things would be, that the generality of mankind ſhould be all ſlaves to a few, and be perpetually chained to the oar, or condemned to the mines.

There are many times as bad conſequences of good things, as of bad: but yet there is a great difference between good and bad for all that. As knowledge and liberty, ſo likewiſe the chriſtian religion is a great happineſs to the world in general, though ſome are ſo unhappy as to be the worſe for it; not becauſe religion is bad, but becauſe they are ſo.

4. If religion be a matter of mens free choice, it is not to be expected that it ſhould neceſſarily and conſtantly have its effect upon men; for it works upon us not by a way of force or natural neceſſity, but of moral perſuaſion. If religion, and the grace of God which goes along with it, did force men to be good and virtuous, and no man could be ſo unleſs he were thus violently forc'd, then it would be no virtue in any man to be good, nor any crime and fault to be otherwiſe. For then the reaſon why ſome men were good, would be becauſe they could not help it; and others bad, becauſe the grace of God did not make them ſo whether they would or not.

But religion does not thus work upon men. It directs men to their duty by the ſhorteſt and plaineſt precepts of a good life; it perſuades men to the obedience of theſe precepts, by the promiſes of eternal happineſs, and the threatnings of eternal miſery in caſe of obſtinate diſobedience; it offers us the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, to help our weakneſs, and enable us to that, for which *we are not ſufficient of ourſelves:* But there is nothing of violence or neceſſity in all this. After all, men may diſobey theſe precepts, and not be perſuaded by theſe arguments, may not make uſe of this grace which God offers, may *quench and reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt*, and *reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves.* And the caſe being thus, it is no wonder, if the temptations of this preſent world prevail upon the vitious inclinations of men againſt their duty, and their true intereſt, and conſequently if the motives and arguments of the chriſtian religion have not a conſtant and certain effect upon a great part of mankind. Not but that Chriſtianity is apt to bring men to goodneſs; but ſome are ſo obſtinately bad, as not to be wrought upon by the moſt powerful conſiderations it can offer to them.

5. It cannot be denied, but that Chriſtianity is as well framed to make men good, as any religion can be imagined to be; and therefore wherever the fault be, it cannot be in the chriſtian religion, that we are not good. So that the bad lives of Chriſtians are no ſufficient objection either againſt the truth or goodneſs of the chriſtian doctrine. Beſides the confirmation that was given to it by miracles, the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its divine and heavenly original. And ſurely the goodneſs of any religion conſiſts in the ſufficiency of its precepts to direct men to their duty; in the force of its arguments to perſuade men to it; and the ſuitableneſs of its aids and helps to enable us to the diſcharge and performance of it. And all thoſe advantages the chriſtian religion hath above any religion or inſtitution that ever was in the world. The reaſonable and plain rules of a good life are no where ſo perfectly collected, as in the diſcourſes of our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles. No religion ever gave men ſo full aſſurance of the mighty rewards and puniſhments of another world; nor ſuch gracious promiſes of divine aſſiſtance, and ſuch evidence of it, eſpecially in the piety,

and virtue, and patience, and ſelf-denial of the primitive Chriſtians, as the doctrine of God our Saviour hath done, *which teacheth men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world, in contemplation of the bleſſed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

6. And *laſtly*, after all that hath or can be ſaid, it muſt be acknowledged, and ought ſadly to be lamented by us, that the wicked lives of Chriſtians are a marvellous ſcandal and reproach to our holy religion, and a great obſtacle to the ſpreading of it in the world, and a real objection againſt it to prejudiced perſons, with whom it doth juſtly bring into doubt the goodneſs and efficacy of the inſtitution itſelf, to ſee how little effect it hath upon the hearts and lives of men. It is hard for a man to maintain the reputation of an excellent maſter in any kind, when all the world ſees that moſt of his ſcholars prove dunces. Whatever commendation may be given to any art or ſcience, men will queſtion the truth and reality of it, when they ſee the greateſt part of thoſe who profeſs it, not able to do any thing anſwerable to it. The chriſtian religion pretends to be an art of ſerving God more decently and devoutly, and of living better than other men; but if it be ſo, why do not the profeſſors of this excellent religion ſhew the force and vertue of it in their lives? And though I have ſufficiently ſhewn, that this is not enough to overthrow the truth, and diſparage the excellency of the chriſtian doctrine; yet it will certainly go a great way with prejudiced perſons, and it cannot be expected otherwiſe.

So that we have infinite reaſon to be aſhamed, that there is ſo plain a contrariety between the laws of Chriſtianity, and the lives of the greateſt part of Chriſtians; ſo notorious and palpable a difference between the religion that is in the Bible, and that which is to be ſeen and read in the converſations of men.

Who that looks upon the manners of the preſent age, could believe, (if he did not know it) that the holy and pure doctrine of the chriſtian religion had ever been ſo much as heard, much leſs pretended to be entertained and believed among us? Nay among thoſe who ſeem to make a more ſerious profeſſion of religion, when we conſider how ſtrangely they allow themſelves in malice and envy, in paſſion, and anger, and uncharitable cenſures, and evil ſpeaking, in fierce contentions and animoſities; who would believe that the great inſtrument of theſe mens religion, I mean the holy Bible, by which they profeſs to regulate and govern their lives, were full of plain and ſtrict precepts of love and kindneſs, of charity and peace, and did a hundred times with all imaginable ſeverity, and under pain of forfeiting the kingdom of God, forbid malice, and envy, and revenge, and evil ſpeaking, and raſh and uncharitable cenſures, and tell us ſo plainly that the chriſtian religion obligeth men *to put off all theſe*; and that *if any man ſeem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain?* Do men read and hear theſe things every day, and profeſs to believe them to be the truths of God, and yet live as if they were verily perſuaded they were falſe? What can we conclude from hence, but either that this is not Chriſtianity, or the greateſt part of us are no Chriſtians?

So that if one of the Apoſtles or primitive Chriſtians ſhould riſe from the dead, and converſe among us, how would he wonder to ſee the face and complexion of Chriſtianity alter'd from what it was in their days; and were it not for the name and title which we bear, would ſooner gueſs us to be any thing than Chriſtians.

So that upon the whole matter, there is no way to quit ourſelves of this objection, and to waſh away the reproach of it, but to mend and reform our lives. Till this be done, it is unavoidable, but the vitious manners of men will affect our religion with obloquy and reproach, and derive an ill conceit and opinion of it into the minds of men. And I cannot ſee how Chriſtianity can ever gain much ground in the world, till it be better adorned and recommended by the profeſſors of it. Nay, we have juſt cauſe to fear, that if God do not raiſe up ſome great and eminent inſtruments to awaken the world out of this ſtupid lethargy, that chriſtianity will every day decline, and the world will in a ſhort ſpace be over-run with atheiſm and infidelity. For vice, and ſuperſtition, and enthuſiaſm, which are the reigning diſeaſes of *Chriſtendom*, when they have run their courſe, and finiſh'd their circle, do all naturally end, and meet in Atheiſm. And then it will be time for the great judge of the world to appear, and effectually to convince men of that, which they would not be perſuaded to believe by any other means.

And of this our Saviour hath given us a terrible and fearful intimation, in that queſtion of his; *When the Son of man comes, ſhall he find faith upon earth?* Our Saviour hath not poſitively affirmed it, and God grant that we may not make it, and find it true.

And thus I have by God's aſſiſtance, given the beſt ſatisfaction I could, to the moſt material exceptions I have met with againſt our bleſſed Saviour and his religion. The

IId Thing remains briefly to be ſpoken to, *viz.* How happy a thing it is to eſcape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion. *Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* And this will appear if we conſider theſe *three* or *four* things.

Firſt, That prejudice does many times ſway and biaſs men againſt the plaineſt and cleareſt truths. We ſee in daily experience, what a falſe biaſs prejudice puts upon mens underſtandings. Men that are educated in the groſſeſt errors and ſuperſtitions, how hard it is to convince them that they are in a wrong way! And with what difficulty are they perſuaded of their miſtake! Nay they have hardly the patience to be told they are in an error, much leſs to conſider what may be offer'd againſt it. How do the paſſions and luſts of men blind them and lead them aſide from the truth, and incline them to that ſide of the queſtion which is moſt favourable to their luſts and intereſts? How partially do men lean to that part which makes moſt for their advantage, though all the reaſon in the world lye on the other ſide?

Now ignorance and miſtake are a great ſlavery of the underſtanding, if there were no worſe conſequences of our errors: and therefore our Saviour ſays excellently, that the truth makes men free; *Ye ſhall know the truth, and the truth ſhall make you free.*

Secondly, Prejudice does not only biaſs men againſt the plaineſt truths, but in matters of greateſt concernment, in things that concern the honour of God, and the good of others, and our own welfare and happineſs. Prejudices againſt religion occaſion miſtakes of the higheſt nature, and may lead men to ſuperſtition and idolatry, and to all manner of impiety, nay many times to atheiſm and infidelity. The prejudices againſt the doctrine of our Saviour are of another concernment than the prejudices which men have againſt the writers of natural philoſophy or eloquence, or any other human art or ſcience. If a man's prejudice make him err in theſe matters, the thing is of no great moment: but the buſineſs of religion is a matter of the greateſt and weightieſt concernment to mankind.

Thirdly, The conſequences of mens prejudices in theſe things prove many times fatal and deſtructive to them. Men may upon unreaſonable prejudices *reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves*, as it is ſaid of the *Chief Prieſts* and *Phariſees* among the *Jews.* Men may oppoſe the truth ſo obſtinately and perverſly, as to be *fighters againſt God*, and to bring certain ruin and *ſwift deſtruction upon themſelves*, both in this world and the other; as the *Jews* did, who by oppoſing the doctrine of the Goſpel, and perſecuting our Saviour and his diſciples, *fill'd up the meaſure of their ſins, till wrath came upon them to the uttermoſt.* It is eaſy to entertain prejudices againſt religion, and by conſidering only the wrong ſide of things, to fortify our prejudices to ſuch a degree, and entrench ourſelves ſo ſtrongly in our errors, that the plaineſt and moſt convincing truths ſhall not be able to have any acceſs to us, or make any impreſſion upon us, but all this while we do in truth undermine our own happineſs, and are ſecretly, working our own ruin; and while we think we are oppoſing an enemy, we are deſtroying our ſelves; *for who hath harden'd himſelf againſt God*, and his truth, *and proſpered?* The principles of religion are a firm and immoveable rock, againſt which the more violently we daſh our ſelves, the more miſerably we ſhall be ſplit and ſhatter'd. Our bleſſed Saviour and his religion have been to many, and are to this day, *a ſtone of ſtumbling, and a rock of offence*; but he himſelf hath told us what ſhall be the fate of thoſe who are offended at him; *Whoſoever ſhall fall on this ſtone, ſhall be broken; but upon whomſoever it ſhall fall, it ſhall grind him to powder.* And therefore well might he ſay here in the text, *Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.*

Fourthly, There are but few in compariſon, who have the happineſs to eſcape and overcome the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain againſt religion. Thus to be ſure it was when Chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world: And though among us the great prejudice of education be removed; yet there are ſtill many, who upon one account or other are prejudiced againſt religion, at leaſt ſo far, as not to yield to the power of it in their lives. Few men are ſo impartial in conſidering things, as not to be ſwayed by the intereſt of their luſts and paſſions, as to keep the balance of their judgments even, and to ſuffer nothing but truth and reaſon to weigh with them. We generally pretend to be *pilgrims and ſtrangers in the world*, and to be all travelling towards heaven: but few of us have the indifferency of travellers; who are not concern'd to find out the faireſt and the eaſieſt way, but to know which is the right way, and to go in it. Thus it ſhould be with us, our end ſhould always be in our eye, and we ſhould chuſe our way only with reſpect to that; not conſidering our inclination ſo much as our deſign; nor chuſing thoſe principles for the government of our lives, which are moſt agreeable to our preſent deſires, but thoſe which will moſt certainly bring us to happineſs at the laſt; and that I am ſure the principles of the chriſtian religion, firmly believed and practiſed by us, will do.

Let us then be perſuaded by all that hath been ſaid upon this argument, to a firm belief of the chriſtian doctrine. I hope you are in ſome meaſure ſatisfied, that the objections againſt it are not ſuch, as ought much to move a wiſe and conſiderate man. If we believe that God hath taken ſo much care of mankind, as to make any certain revelation of his will to them, and of the way to eternal happineſs; let us next conſider, whether any religion in the world can come in competition with the chriſtian, and with half that reaſon pretend to be from God, that Chriſtianity is able to produce for it ſelf, whether we conſider the things to be believed or the duties to be practiſed, or the motives and arguments to the practice of thoſe duties, or the divine confirmation that is given to the whole. And if we be thus perſuaded concerning it, let us reſolve to live up to the laws and rules of this holy religion. Our belief of it ſignifies nothing without the fruits and effects of a good life. And if this were once reſolved upon, the difficulty of believing would ceaſe; for the true reaſon why men are unwilling to believe the truths of the Goſpel, is becauſe they are loth to put them in practice: *Every one that doth evil hateth the light.* The true ground of moſt mens prejudice againſt the chriſtian doctrine, is becauſe they have no mind to obey it; and when all is done, the great objection that lies at the bottom of mens minds againſt it, is, that it is an enemy to their luſts, and they cannot profeſs to believe it without condemning themſelves, for not complying with it in their lives and practice.

SERMON LXVI.

Jeſus, the Son of God, prov'd by his Reſurrection.

ROM. i. 4.

And declared to be the Son of God, with Power, according to the Spirit of Holineſs; by the Reſurrection from the dead.

ST. *Paul*, in the beginning of this epiſtle (according to his cuſtom in the reſt) ſtiles himſelf an Apoſtle, particularly call'd, and ſet apart by God, for the preaching of the Goſpel; the main ſubject whereof was, *Jeſus Chriſt our Lord*; who as he was, according to his divine nature, *the eternal Son of God*; ſo according to his human nature, he was not only *the Son of man*, but alſo *the Son of God*. *According to the fleſh* (that is, the weakneſs, and frailty, and mortality of his human nature) *he was the Son of David*, that is, of his poſterity by his mother, who was of that houſe and line. *Made of the ſeed of David, according to the fleſh, v.* 3. *But according to the Spirit of holineſs*; (that is, in regard of that divine power of the holy Ghoſt, which was manifeſt in him, eſpecially in his reſurrection from the dead) *he was demonſtrated to be the Son of God*; even according to his human nature; *declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holineſs, by the reſurrection from the dead.*

All the difficulty in the words, is concerning the meaning of this phraſe; of Chriſt's being *declared to be the Son of God:* The word is ὁρισθέντος, which moſt frequently in Scripture does ſignify *predeſtinated, decreed, determined*; but likewiſe ſignifies, that which is *defined, declared, demonſtrated, put out of all doubt and controverſy*. And in this ſenſe our tranſlation renders it. As if the Apoſtle had ſaid, that our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, though according to the frailty and weakneſs of his human nature, he was of the ſeed of *David*; yet in reſpect of that divine power of the holy Ghoſt, which manifeſted it ſelf in him, eſpecially in his reſurrection from the dead, he was *declared to be the Son of God, with power*, that is, mightily, powerfully demonſtrated to be ſo; ſo as to put the matter out of all diſpute and controverſy.

And therefore following our own tranſlation, I ſhall handle the words in this ſenſe, as containing this propoſition in them; *that the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt from the dead, by the holy Ghoſt, is a powerful demonſtration that he was the Son of God.*

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this propoſition to conſider theſe *two* things:

Firſt, Upon what account Chriſt, as man, is ſaid to be *the Son of God.*

Secondly, In what ſenſe he is ſaid to be *declared to be the Son of God by his reſurrection from the dead.* The conſideration of theſe *two* particulars will fully clear this propoſition, and the Apoſtle's meaning in it.

Firſt, Upon what account Chriſt, as a man, is ſaid to be *the Son of God.* And for our right apprehenſion of this matter, it is very well worthy our obſervation, that Chriſt, as man, is no where in Scripture ſaid to be *the Son of God*, but with relation to the divine power of the holy Ghoſt, ſome way or other eminently manifeſted in him; I ſay the divine power of the holy Ghoſt, as the Lord and giver of Life, as he is call'd in the ancient creeds of the Chriſtian Church. For as men are naturally ſaid to be the Children of thoſe from whom they receive their life and being; ſo Chriſt, as man, is ſaid to be *the Son of God*, becauſe he had life communicated to him, from the Father, by an immediate power of the Spirit of God, or the holy Ghoſt. Firſt at his conception, which was by the holy Ghoſt. The conception of our bleſſed Saviour was an immediate act of the power of the holy Ghoſt, overſhadowing, as the Scripture expreſſeth it, the bleſſed mother of our Lord: And then at his reſurrection, when after his death, he was, by the operation of the holy Ghoſt, raiſed to life again.

Now upon theſe two accounts only, Chriſt, as man, is ſaid in Scripture to be *the Son of God.* He was really ſo upon account of his conception; but this was ſecret and inviſible: but moſt eminently and remarkably ſo, upon account of his reſurrection, which was open and viſible to all.

1. Upon account of his conception by the power of the holy Ghoſt. That upon this account he was called *the Son of God*, St. *Luke* moſt expreſly tells us, *Luke* i. 35. where the Angel tells the Virgin *Mary*, that *the holy Ghoſt ſhould come upon her, and the power of the higheſt ſhould overſhadow her, and therefore that holy thing, which ſhould be born of her, ſhould be call'd the Son of God.* And this our Saviour means *by the Father's ſanctifying him, and ſending him into the world*; for which reaſon he ſays he might juſtly call himſelf *the Son of God*, John x. 35, 36. *If ye call them Gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken: Say ye of him, whom the Father hath ſanctified, and ſent into the world, thou blaſphemeſt, becauſe I ſaid I am the Son of God?* If there had been no other reaſon, this had been ſufficient to have given him the title of *the Son of God*, that he was brought into the world by the ſanctification, or divine power of the holy Ghoſt.

2. Chriſt is alſo ſaid in Scriptnre to be *the Son of God*, and to be *declared* to be ſo, upon account of *his reſurrection from the dead*, by the power of the holy Ghoſt. His reſurrection from the dead is here in the text aſcribed to *the Spirit of holineſs*, or the holy Ghoſt. And ſo in other places of Scripture, *Rom.* viii. 11. *If the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you:* and 1 *Pet.* iii. 18. *Being put to death in the fleſh, but quickened by the Spirit*; that is, he ſuffer'd in that frail mortal nature which he aſſumed: but was raiſed again by the power of the holy Ghoſt, of the Spirit of God which reſided in him. And upon this account he is expreſly ſaid in Scripture to be *the Son of God.* Pſal. ii. 7. *I will declare the decree; the Lord hath ſaid unto me, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, to which perhaps the Apoſtle alludes here in the text, when he ſays that *Chriſt was decreed to be the Son of God, by his reſurrection from the dead.* To be ſure theſe words, *this day have I begotten thee*, St. *Paul* expreſly tells us were accompliſh'd in the reſurrection of Chriſt; as if God by raiſing him from the dead, had *begotten* him, and *decreed* him to be *his Son.* Acts xiii. 32, 33. *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promiſe which was made unto the Fathers, God hath fulfilled the ſame unto their Children, in that he hath raiſed up Jeſus again, as it is alſo written in the ſecond Pſalm, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

He was *the Son of God* before, as he was conceived by the holy Ghoſt; but this was ſecret and inviſible, and known only to the mother of our Lord: And therefore God thought fit to give a publick and viſible demonſtration of it, ſo as to put the matter out of all queſtion; he declared him in a powerful manner to be his Son, by giving him a new life after death, by raiſing him from the dead; and by this new and eminent teſtimony given to him, declared him again to be his Son, and confirmed the title which was given him before upon a true, but more ſecret account, of his being conceived by the holy Ghoſt.

And as our Saviour is ſaid to be *the Son of God* upon this twofold account, of his conception by the holy Ghoſt, and his reſurrection to life by the Spirit of God: So the Scripture (which does ſollicitouſly purſue a reſemblance and conformity between Chriſt and Chriſtians) does likewiſe upon a twofold account (anſwerable to our Saviour's birth and reſurrection) call true Believers and Chriſtians, *the children of God, viz.* Upon account of their regeneration or new birth, by the operation of the Spirit of God; and upon account of their reſurrection to eternal life, by the power of the ſame Spirit.

Upon account of our regeneration and becoming Chriſtians by the power and operation of the holy Spirit of God upon our minds, we are ſaid to be the Children of God, as being regenerated and born again by the holy Spirit of God: And this is our firſt adoption: And for this reaſon the Spirit of God conferred upon Chriſtians at their baptiſm, and dwelling and reſiding in them afterwards, is call'd *the Spirit of adoption*; Rom. viii. 15. *Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, Abba Father*; and *Gal.* iv. 5, 6. Believers are ſaid to *receive the adoption of Sons*; *God having ſent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying Abba Father*; that is, all Chriſtians, foraſmuch as they are regenerated by the holy Spirit of God, and having the Spirit of God dwelling in them, may with confidence call God Father, and look upon themſelves as his children. So the Apoſtle tells us, *Rom.* viii. 14. *That as many as are led (or acted) by the Spirit of God, are the ſons of God.*

But though we are ſaid to be children of God upon account of our regeneration, and the holy Spirit of God dwelling and reſiding in Chriſtians; yet we are eminently ſo, upon account of our reſurrection to eternal life, by the mighty power of God's Spirit. This is our final adoption and the conſummation of it; and therefore, *Rom.* viii. 21. this is called *the glorious liberty of the Sons of God,* becauſe by this we are for ever *deliver'd from the bondage of corruption*; and by way of eminency, *the adoption*, viz. *the redemption of our bodies.*

We are indeed *the ſons of God* before, upon account of the regenerating and ſanctifying virtue of the holy Ghoſt; but finally and chiefly upon account of our reſurrection by the power of the divine Spirit. So St. *John* tells us, that then we ſhall be declared to be *the Sons of God*, after another manner than we are now: 1 *John* iii 1. *Behold what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed upon us, that we ſhould be called the ſons of God. Now we are the ſons of God,* (that is, our adoption is begun in our regeneration and ſanctification) *but it doth not yet appear what we ſhall be*; we ſhall be much more eminently ſo at the reſurrection. *We know, that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him.*

But the moſt expreſs and remarkable text to this purpoſe, is, *Luke* xx. 36. where good men, after the reſurrection are for this reaſon ſaid to be *the children of God,* becauſe they are *the children of the reſurrection. But they who ſhall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the reſurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the Angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the reſurrection.* For this reaſon they are ſaid to be *the children of God,* becauſe they are raiſed by him to a new life; and to be made partakers of that which is promiſed to them, and reſerved for them. For all that are raiſed by the power of God out of the duſt of the earth, are not therefore *the children of God*; but only that they have part in the bleſſed reſurrection to eternal life, and *do inherit the kingdom prepared for them.* Not thoſe who are raiſed to a perpetual death, and the *reſurrection of condemnation.* Theſe are not the *children of God*; but *the children of wrath,* and *the children of perdition.*

But the reſurrection of the juſt, is the full and final declaration, that we are *the children of God*; not only becauſe we are reſtored to a new life, but becauſe at the reſurrection, we are admitted to the full poſſeſſion of that bleſſed inheritance which is purchaſed for us, and promiſed to us.

And the Spirit of God which is conferred upon believers in their regeneration, and afterwards dwells and reſides in them, is the pledge and earneſt of our final adoption, by our reſurrection to eternal life; and upon this account and no other, is ſaid to be the *earneſt* of our future inheritance, and the *ſeal* and confirmation of it. *Eph.* i. 13. *In whom alſo, after that ye believed, ye were ſealed by the holy Spirit of promiſe, which is the earneſt of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchas'd poſſeſſion*; that is, the holy Spirit of God which Chriſtians were made partakers of, upon their ſincere belief of the chriſtian religion, is the ſeal and earneſt of our reſurrection to eternal life; as the Apoſtle plainly tells us, in that remarkable text, *Rom.* viii. 11. *If the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

I have been the longer upon this, becauſe it ſerves fully to explain to us thoſe obſcure phraſes, of the *ſeal* and *earneſt*, and *firſt fruits of the Spirit*, which many have miſtaken to import ſome particular and ſpiritual revelation or impreſſion upon the minds of good men, aſſuring them of their ſalvation. Whereas the Apoſtle intended no more by them, but that the Spirit of God which dwells in believers, enabling them *to mortify the deeds of the fleſh, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit*, is a pledge and earneſt to us of a bleſſed reſurrection to eternal life by the power of the Spirit of God which now dwells in us, and is the ſame Spirit which raiſed up Jeſus from the dead. And in this chapter, the Spirit of God is ſaid, *v.* 16. *to bear witneſs to our ſpirits*, that is, to aſſure our minds, *that we are the children of God*, that is, that we are his children now, and conſequently heirs of a glorious reſurrection to eternal life: for ſo it follows in the next words, *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Chriſt; if ſo be that we ſuffer with him, that we may alſo be glorified together.* And this being glorified together with Chriſt at the reſurrection, he calls, *v.* 19. *the manifeſtation of the Sons of God.* Thus you ſee how in conformity to *the Son of God*, our elder brother, we are ſaid to be *the Sons of God*, becauſe we are now regenerated, and ſhall at the laſt day be raiſed up to eternal life, by the power of the Spirit of God. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded to ſpeak to, for the clearing of theſe words, namely, in what ſenſe Chriſt is ſaid to be *declared*, or *demonſtrated to be the Son of God by his reſurrection from the dead.* By which the Apoſtle means theſe two things:

1. That by his reſurrection from the dead he was approved by God to be the true Meſſias, and vindicated to the world from all ſuſpicion of being a deceiver and impoſtor. And conſequently in the

2. Place, That hereby God gave teſtimony to the truth and divinity of his doctrine.

1. By his reſurrection from the dead, he was approved by God to be the true Meſſias, foretold by the Prophets, and expected at that time by the *Jews*, and ſufficiently vindicated to the world to be no deceiver and impoſtor.

And for our fuller underſtanding of this, we are to conſider theſe *two* things;

(1.) What the apprehenſions and expectations of the *Jews* were concerning the Meſſias. And

(2.) What the many crimes were which they laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him.

(1.) What the apprehenſions and expectations of the *Jews* were concerning the Meſſias. And it is very plain from the evangelical hiſtory, that they generally apprehended theſe two things of him: That the Meſſias was to be *the Son of God*, and *the King of Iſrael*; and therefore that our Saviour, by affirming himſelf to be the Meſſias, did call himſelf *the Son of God*, and *the King of Iſrael*. *John* i. 41. *Andrew* tells his brother *Simon, we have found the Meſſias.* *v.* 45. *Philip* tells *Nathaniel, we have found him of whom Moſes in the Law, and the Prophets did write*; that is, the Meſſias. *v.* 49. *Nathaniel* upon diſcourſe with our Saviour, being convinced that he was the Meſſias, owns him in theſe terms; *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Iſrael.* John vi. 69. *Peter* declares his belief that he was the Chriſt, or the Meſſias, in theſe words, *we believe and are ſure that thou art the Son of the living God.* This appears likewiſe from the High-prieſt's queſtion to him, *Matt.* xxvi. 63. *Art thou the Chriſt* (that is, the Meſſias) *the Son of the living God*; or as it is in St. *Mark*, *the Son of the bleſſed*; compared with *Pilate*'s queſtion, *art thou the King of the Jews?* And when he was upon the croſs, ſome reviled him under the notion of *the Son of God*, Matth. xxvii. 40. *If thou be the Son of God, come down from the croſs:* others under the notion of *the King of Iſrael*, *v.* 42. *If he be the King of Iſrael let him come down from the croſs.* From all which it is plain that the *Jews* expected and believed, that the true Meſſias was to be *the Son of God*, and *the King of Iſrael*; and whoever was not ſo, was a deceiver and impoſtor. But our Saviour affirmed himſelf to be the true Meſſias, and *the Son of God.* Now God by raiſing him from the dead, did abundantly vindicate him to the world, from all ſuſpicion of impoſture; and gave teſtimony to him, that he was all that he ſaid of himſelf, *viz. the true Meſſias, and the Son of God.*

Which will further appear, if we conſider (*2dly.*) What were the crimes which the *Jews* laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him; and they were mainly theſe two, That by giving himſelf out to be *the Meſſias*, he made himſelf *King of Iſrael*, and *the Son of God*. Of the firſt of theſe they accuſed him to *Pilate*, hoping by this accuſation to make him guilty of ſedition againſt the *Roman* government, for ſaying, that he was *the King of Iſrael*. Of the other they accuſed him to the chief prieſts, as being guilty of blaſphemy, in that not being *the Meſſias*, he call'd himſelf *the Son of God*. And upon this they laid the main ſtreſs, as being a thing that would condemn him by their law. They charged him with this in his life-time, as appears by thoſe words of our Saviour, *John* x. 36. *Say ye of him whom the Father hath ſanctified, and ſent into the world, thou blaſphemeſt, becauſe I ſaid I am the Son of God?* And when he was arraigned before the chief prieſts, they accuſed him of this, and he owning this charge, *that he call'd himſelf the Son of God*, upon this they judged him guilty of death. *Matt.* xxvi. 65, 66. *Then the high prieſt rent his cloaths, and ſaid, he hath ſpoken blaſphemy; what further need have we of witneſs? behold, now ye have heard his blaſphemy. What think ye? They anſwered, he is guilty of death.* And when *Pilate* told them, that he found no fault in him, they ſtill inſtance in this as his crime, *John* xix. 7. *We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, becauſe he made himſelf the Son of God.*

Now this being the crime which was charged upon him, and for which he was crucified, and put to death; God, by raiſing him up from the dead, and taking him up into heaven, gave teſtimony to him, that he was no impoſtor, and that he did not vainly arrogate to himſelf to be the Meſſias and *the Son of God*. God by raiſing him from the dead, by the power of the holy Ghoſt, gave a mighty demonſtration to him, that he was *the Son of God*. For which reaſon he is ſaid by the Apoſtle, 1 *Tim.* iii. 16. to be *juſtified by the Spirit*. The Spirit gave teſtimony to him at his baptiſm, and by the mighty works that appeared in him in his life-time; but he was moſt eminently and remarkably *juſtified by the holy Ghoſt, by his reſurrection from the dead*; God hereby bearing him witneſs, that he was unjuſtly condemned, and that he aſſumed nothing to himſelf, but what of right did belong to him, when he ſaid he was the Meſſias, and *the Son of God*. For how could a man that was condemned to die for calling himſelf *the Son of God*, be more remarkably vindicated, and more clearly proved to be ſo, than by being raiſed from the dead, by the power of God?

And, *2dly*, God did conſequently hereby give teſtimony to the truth and divinity of our Saviour's doctrine. Being proved by his reſurrection to be *the Son of God*, this proved him to be a teacher ſent by him, and that what he declared to the world was the mind and will of God. For this none was more likely to know, and to report truly to mankind, than *the Son of God*, who came from *the boſom of his Father*. And becauſe the reſurrection of Chriſt is ſo great a teſtimony to the truth of his doctrine, hence it is that St. *Paul* tells us, that the belief of this one article of Chriſt's reſurrection, is ſufficient to a man's ſalvation, *Rom.* x. 9. *If thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus, and ſhalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raiſed him from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved.* The reaſon is plain, becauſe the reſurrection of Chriſt confirmed the truth and divinity of his doctrine; ſo that the belief of our Saviour's reſurrection does by neceſſary conſequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine. That God raiſed him from the dead after he was condemned and put to death for calling himſelf *the Son of God*, is a demonſtration that he really was *the Son of God*, and if he was *the Son of God*, the doctrine which he taught was true, and from God.

And thus I have ſhewn you, how the *reſurrection* of Chriſt from the dead, is a *powerful demonſtration* that he was *the Son of God.*

All that remains, is briefly to draw ſome practical inferences from the conſideration of our Saviour's reſurrection.

1ſt. To confirm and eſtabliſh our minds in the belief of the chriſtian religion, of which the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead is ſo great a confirmation. And therefore I told you that this one article is mention'd by St. *Paul* as the ſum and abridgment of the chriſtian faith; *If thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and believe in thy heart that God hath raiſed him from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved.* The belief of our Saviour's reſurrection doth by neceſſary conſequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine for he who believes that God raiſed him from the dead, after he was put to death for calling himſelf *the Son of God*, cannot but believe him to be *the Son of God*; and conſequently that the doctrine which he delivered was from God.

2*dly*, The reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead aſſures us of a future judgment, and of the recompences and rewards of another world. That Chriſt was raiſed from the dead, is a demonſtration of another life after this; and no man that believes the immortality of our ſouls, and another life after this, ever doubted of a future judgment; ſo that by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead, God hath given aſſurance unto all men of a future judgment, and conſequently of the recompences and rewards of another world.

The conſideration whereof ought to have a mighty influence upon us, more eſpecially to theſe three purpoſes:

1*ſt*, To raiſe our minds above the preſent enjoyments of this life. Were but men convinced of this great and obvious truth, that there is an infinite difference between time and eternity, between a few days and everlaſting ages; would we but ſometimes repreſent to ourſelves, what thoughts and apprehenſions dying men have of this world, how vain and empty a thing it appears to them; how like a pageant and ſhadow it looks, as it paſſeth away from them; methinks none of theſe things could be a ſufficient temptation to any man to forget God and his ſoul; but notwithſtanding all the preſent delights, and allurements of ſenſe, we ſhould be ſtrongly intent upon the concernments of another world, and almoſt wholly taken up with the thoughts of the vaſt eternity which we are ready to enter into. For what is there in this world, this vaſt and howling wilderneſs, this rude and barbarous country which we are but to paſs through, which ſhould detain and entangle our affections, and take off our thoughts from our everlaſting habitation, from that *better*, and *that heavenly country*, where we hope to live and to be happy for ever?

2*dly*, The conſideration of the rewards of another world ſhould comfort and ſupport us under the troubles and afflictions of this world. The hopes of a bleſſed reſurrection are a very proper conſideration to bear us up under the evils and preſſures of this life. If we hope for ſo great a happineſs hereafter, we may be contented to bear ſome afflictions in this world; becauſe the bleſſedneſs which we expect will ſo abundantly recompenſe and outweigh our preſent ſufferings. So the Apoſtle aſſures us, *Rom.* viii. 18. *We know that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us.* The conſideration whereof was that which made the primitive Chriſtians to triumph in their ſufferings, and in the midſt of all their tribulations *to rejoice in the hopes of the glory of God*; becauſe their ſufferings did really prepare and make way for their glory. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 2 *Cor.* iv. 17, 18. *Our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.*

3*dly* and laſtly, The aſſurance of our future reward is a mighty encouragement to obedience and a holy life. What greater encouragement can we have than this, That all the good which we do in this world will accompany us into the other? *That when we reſt from our labours, our works will follow us?* That when we ſhall be ſtript of other things, and parted from them, theſe will ſtill remain with us, and bear us company? Our riches and honours, our ſenſual pleaſures and enjoyments will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay, many times they do not accompany us ſo far as the grave, but take occaſion to forſake us, when we have the greateſt need and uſe of them: but piety and virtue are *that better part which cannot be taken from us.* All the good actions which we do in this world will go along with us into the other, and through the merits of our Redeemer procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a glorious and eternal reward; not according to the meanneſs of our ſervices, but according to the bounty of his mind, and the vaſtneſs of his treaſures and eſtate.

Now what an encouragement is this to holineſs and obedience, to conſider that it will all be our own another day; to be aſſured that whoever ſerves God faithfully, and does ſuffer for him patiently, does lay up ſo much treaſure for himſelf in another world, and provides laſting comforts for himſelf, and faithful and conſtant companions, that will never leave him nor forſake him?

Let us then do all the good we can, while we have opportunity, and ſerve God with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do ſhall be loſt and fall to the ground, that every grace and virtue that we exerciſe in this life, and every degree of them, *ſhall receive their full recompence at the reſurrection of the juſt.*

How ſhould this inſpire us with reſolution and zeal and induſtry in the ſervice of God, to have ſuch a reward continually in our eye; how ſhould it tempt us to our duty, to have *a crown* and *a kingdom* offered to us, *joys unſpeakable and full of glory, ſuch things as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor have entred into the heart of man?* And *ſuch are the things which God hath laid up for them who love him heartily, and ſerve him faithfully in this world.*

SERMON LXVII.

The Danger of Apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity.

HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6.

For it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlighten'd, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they ſhall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame.

THESE words are full of difficulties, and the miſunderſtanding of them hath not only been an occaſion of a great deal of trouble, and even deſpair to particular perſons, but one of the chief reaſons why the church of *Rome* did for a long time reject the authority of this book; which by the way I cannot but take notice of as a demonſtrative inſtance both of the fallible judgment of that church, and of the fallibility of oral tradition; for St. *Jerom* more than once expreſſly tells us, *that in his time* (which was about 400 years after Chriſt) *the church of* Rome *did not receive this epiſtle for canonical:* but it is plain, that ſince that time, whether moved by the evidence of the thing, or (which is more probable) by the conſent and authority of other churches, they have received it, and do at this day acknowledge it for *canonical*; from whence one of theſe two things will neceſſarily follow; either that they were in an error for 400 years together while they rejected it; or that they have ſince erred for a longer time in receiving it. One of theſe is unavoidable; for if the book be *canonical* now, it was ſo from the beginning; for *Bellarmine* himſelf confeſſeth (and if he had not confeſſed it, it is nevertheleſs true and certain) that the church cannot make a book *canonical*, which was not ſo before; if it was not *canonical* at firſt, it cannot be made ſo afterward; ſo that let them chuſe which part they will, it is evident, beyond all denial, that the church of *Rome* hath actually erred in her judgment concerning the authority of this book; and one error of this kind is enough to deſtroy her infallibility, there being no greater evidence that a church is not infallible, than if it plainly appear that ſhe hath been deceived.

And this alſo is a convincing inſtance of the fallibility of oral tradition. For if *that* be infallible in delivering down to us the *canonical* books of ſcripture, it neceſſarily follows, that whatever books were delivered down to us for *canonical* in one age, muſt have been ſo in all ages; and whatever was rejected in any age, muſt always have been rejected: but we plainly ſee the contrary, from the inſtance of this epiſtle, concerning which the church of *Rome* (which pretends to be the great and faithful preſerver of tradition) hath in ſeveral ages deliver'd ſeveral things. This is a peremptory inſtance both of the fallibility of the *Roman* church, and of her oral tradition.

Having obſerved this by the way, which I could not well paſs by upon ſo fair an occaſion, I ſhall betake myſelf to the explication of theſe words; towards which it will be no ſmall advantage to conſider the particular phraſes and expreſſions in the text. *It is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlighten'd*; that is, were ſolemnly admitted into the church by baptiſm, and embraced the profeſſion of Chriſtianity. Nothing was more frequent among the antients, than to call baptiſm φωτισμὸν, *illumination*; and thoſe who were baptized were called, φωτιζόμενοι, *enlighten'd perſons*, becauſe of that divine illumination which was convey'd to the minds of men by the knowledge of Chriſtianity, the doctrine whereof they made profeſſion of at their baptiſm. And therefore *Juſtin Martyr* tells us, *that by calling upon God the Father, and the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the name of the holy Ghoſt*, ὁ φωτιζόμενος λούεται, *the enlighten'd perſon is waſhed*; and again more expreſly, Καλεῖται δὲ τοῦτο λουτρὸν φωτισμός, *this laver* (ſpeaking of baptiſm) *is called illumination.* And St. *Cyprian* gives us the reaſon; becauſe by virtue of baptiſm *in expiatum pectus ac purum deſuper ſe lumen infundit, Light is infuſed from above into the purified ſoul.* And that this expreſſion is ſo to be underſtood here in the text, as alſo *chap.* x. 32. the *Syriac* and *Æthiopic* give us good ground to believe; for they render the text thus, *It is impoſſible for thoſe who have been once baptized, and have taſted of the heavenly gift.* And at the 10*th* chap. *v.* 32. which we tranſlate, *But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions*; that is, call to mind the former days, in which after by baptiſm ye had publickly embraced the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, ye were upon that account expoſed to many grievous ſufferings and perſecutions. So that I think there can be no great doubt, but, by *thoſe that were once enlighten'd*, the Apoſtle means *thoſe that were baptized.*

To proceed then, *For it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlighten'd, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy Ghoſt*; theſe two expreſſions ſeem to denote the ſpiritual benefits and graces of the holy Ghoſt conferred upon Chriſtians by baptiſm, particularly regeneration, which is the proper work of the holy Ghoſt, and juſtification and remiſſion of ſins. So we find faith, whereby we are juſtified, called the gift of God, *Eph.* ii. 8. *Faith is the gift of God*; and our juſtification is called a gift, and a free gift, five ſeveral times in one chapter, *Rom.* v. 15, 16, 17, 18. *But not as the offence, ſo alſo is the free gift; for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man Jeſus Chriſt, hath abounded unto many*; and what this free gift is, he tells us in the next words, *viz.* juſtification, or remiſſion of ſins, *v.* 16. *And not as it was by one that ſinned, ſo is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto juſtification. For if by one man's offence, death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteouſneſs, ſhall reign in life by one Jeſus Chriſt. Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even ſo by the righteouſneſs of one, the free gift came upon all men unto juſtification of life.* So that by the *heavenly gift*, I underſtand remiſſion of ſins, and by being *made partakers of the holy Ghoſt*, the ſanctifying power and efficacy of God's Spirit.

And have taſted the good word of God; that is, entertained the Goſpel, which is here called *the good word of God*, by reaſon of the gracious promiſes contained in it, particularly the promiſes of eternal life and happineſs.

And the powers of the world to come, δυνάμεις τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, the powers of the goſpel age; that is, the miraculous powers of the holy Ghoſt which were beſtowed upon men, in order to the propagation of the Goſpel. And that this is the true meaning of this phraſe, will I think be very plain to any one who ſhall but conſider, that the word δυνάμεις is generally in Scripture uſed for miraculous powers and operations; and particularly to expreſs the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghoſt, which were beſtowed upon the Apoſtles and firſt chriſtians; (I need not cite the particular texts for the proof of this, they are ſo many and ſo well known;) And then if we conſider farther, that the times of the Goſpel, the days of the *Meſſias*, are frequently called by the *Jews ſæculum futurum, the age to come.* And indeed this is the very phraſe uſed by the LXX concerning our Saviour, *Iſa.* ix. 6. where he is called according to our tranſlation, *The everlaſting Father*, but according to that of the LXX πατὴρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, *The Father of the future age.* And this very phraſe is uſed once more in this epiſtle to the *Heb. ch.* ii. 5. *For unto the Angels hath he not put in ſubjection the world to come, whereof we now ſpeak.* He had ſaid before, *that the law was given by angels*, v. 2. *if the word ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt*; but the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, which he calls *the world to come*, or the future age, was not committed to them, this was adminiſtred by the *Son of God*; *Unto the angels hath he not put in ſubjection the world to come.* And 'tis obſervable, that this phraſe is only uſed in this epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, becauſe the *Jews* very well underſtood the meaning of it, being that whereby they commonly expreſt the times of the Goſpel, according to that ancient tradition of the houſe of *Elias*, which diſtributed the duration of the world into three αἰῶνες, or ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the *Meſſias*, which they called the *ſeculum futurum*, or *the age to come*; and which is likewiſe in Scripture called, *the laſt days*, or *times*, and the *concluſion of the ages.* Concerning which, it was particularly propheſied, that the holy Ghoſt ſhould be poured forth upon men in miraculous gifts and powers. And to this very purpoſe the Prophet *Joel* is cited by St. *Peter*, *Acts* ii. 16, 17. *This is that which was ſpoken by the prophet Joel, And it ſhall come to paſs in the laſt days (ſaith God) I will pour out my Spirit upon all Fleſh; and your ſons and your daughters ſhall propheſie*, &c. From all which it is very evident, that by *taſting of the powers of the world to come*, is meant being partakers of the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghoſt, which were poured forth in the goſpel age, by the *Jews* commonly called *the world to come.*

If they ſhall fall away; that is, if after all this they ſhall apoſtatize from this profeſſion, out of love to this preſent world, or from the fear of perſecutions and ſufferings.

It is impoſſible to renew them again to repentance; that is, it is a thing very difficult, hardly to be hoped for, that ſuch wilful and notorious apoſtates ſhould be reſtored again by repentance. For the word ἀδύνατον, which we tranſlate *impoſſible*, is not always to be taken in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, for that which abſolutely cannot be; but many times for that which is ſo very difficult that it ſeems next to an impoſſibility. So our Saviour, that which in one place he calls *exceeding hard*; viz. *for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*, he afterwards calls *impoſſible with men*; and ſo here I underſtand the Apoſtle, that thoſe who apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, after baptiſm and the benefits of it, *'tis exceeding hard to recover them again to repentance:* This phraſe, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, to *renew them again to repentance*, ſome underſtand of reſtoring them again to the peace and communion of the church, by a courſe of penance, ſuch as was preſcribed in the ancient church to great offenders; and then they underſtand by ἀδύνατον, not a *natural*, but a *moral impoſſibility*; that which cannot be done according to the orders and conſtitutions of the church; that is, the church did refuſe to admit apoſtates, and ſome other great offenders, as murderers and adulterers, to a courſe of penance, in order to their reconciliation with the church; This *Tertullian* tells us was the ſtrictneſs of the church in his time, *Neque idololatriæ, neque ſanguini pax ab eccleſiâ redditur*; they admitted neither idolaters, nor murderers, to the reconciliation of the church. Though they were never ſo patient, and ſhed never ſo many tears, yet he ſays they were *jejunæ pacis lachrymæ*, their tears were in vain, to reconcile them to the peace and communion of the church. He ſays indeed they did not abſolutely pronounce their caſe deſperate in reſpect of God's pardon and forgiveneſs; *ſed de veniâ Deo reſervamus*, for that they referr'd them to God: but they were never to be admitted again into the church; ſo ſtrict were many churches, and that upon the authority of this text; though the church of *Rome* was more moderate in this matter, and for that reaſon call'd the authority of this book into queſtion.

But I ſee no reaſon why theſe words ſhould primarily be underſtood of reſtoring men to the communion of the church by penance: but they ſeem to be meant of reſtoring men to the favour of God by repentance; of which indeed their being reſtor'd to the communion of the church was a good ſign. This the Apoſtle ſays was *very difficult*, for thoſe who after baptiſm, and the ſeveral benefits of it, did apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, *to be recover'd again to repentance.*

Seeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame. This is ſpoken by way of aggravation of the crime of apoſtaſy, that they who fall off from Chriſtianity, in effect and by interpretation do *crucify the Son of God* over again, and expoſe him to ſhame and reproach, as the *Jews* did; for by denying and renouncing of him, they declare him to be an impoſtor, and conſequently worthy of that death which he ſuffered, and that ignominy which he was expoſed to; and therefore, in account of God, they are ſaid to do that, which by their actions they do approve; ſo that it is made a crime of the higheſt nature, as if they ſhould *crucify the Son of God*, and uſe him in the moſt ignominious manner, even *tread under foot the Son of God*, as the expreſſion is to the ſame purpoſe, *ch.* x. 29.

Thus I have endeavour'd, as briefly and clearly as I could, to explain to you the true meaning and importance of the ſeveral phraſes and expreſſions in the text; the ſenſe whereof amounts to this, That if thoſe who are baptized, and by baptiſm have received remiſſion of ſins, and do believe the doctrine of the Goſpel, and the promiſes of it, and are endowed with the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghoſt, if ſuch perſons as theſe ſhall after all this apoſtatize from Chriſtianity, it is very hard, and next to an impoſſibility, to imagine how ſuch perſons ſhould recover again by repentance, ſeeing they are guilty of as great a crime, as if in their own perſons they had put to death and ignominiouſly uſed *the Son of God*, becauſe by rejecting of him, they declared to the world, that he ſuffered deſervedly.

Having thus explained the words, in order to the further vindication of them from the miſtakes and miſapprehenſions which have been about them, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe *five* things:

1ſt, That the ſin here mention'd is not *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt*.

2dly, That the Apoſtle does not declare it to be abſolutely impoſſible, but only that thoſe who are guilty of it are recover'd to repentance with great difficulty.

3dly, That it is not a partial apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion by any particular vicious practice.

4thly, That it is a total apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion, and more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry, which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of.

5thly, The reaſon of the difficulty of the recovery of thoſe who fall into this ſin.

1ſt, That the ſin here mentioned is not *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt*, which I have heretofore diſcourſed of, and ſhewn wherein the particular nature of it does conſiſt. There are three things which do remarkably diſtinguiſh the ſin here ſpoken of in the text, from *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt* deſcribed by our Saviour:

1ſt, The perſons that are guilty of this ſin here in the text, are evidently ſuch as had embraced Chriſtianity, and had taken upon them the profeſſion of it: whereas thoſe whom our Saviour chargeth with *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt*, are ſuch as conſtantly oppoſed his doctrine, and reſiſted the evidence he offer'd for it.

2dly, The particular nature of *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt* conſiſted in blaſpheming the Spirit whereby our Saviour wrought his miracles, and ſaying he did not thoſe things by the Spirit of God, but by the aſſiſtance of the devil, in that malicious and unreaſonable imputing of the plain effects of the holy Ghoſt to the power of the devil, and conſequently in an obſtinate refuſal to be convinced by the miracles that he wrought: but here is nothing of all this ſo much as intimated by the Apoſtle in this place.

3dly, *The ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt* is declared to be abſolutely *unpardonable both in this world, and in that which is to come.* But this is not declared to be abſolutely unpardonable; which brings me to the

2d Thing, namely, That this ſin here ſpoken of by the Apoſtle, is not ſaid to be abſolutely unpardonable. It is not *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt*; and whatever elſe it be, it is not out of the compaſs of God's pardon and forgiveneſs. So our Saviour hath told us, *that all manner of ſin whatſoever that men have committed is capable of pardon, excepting only the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt.* And though the Apoſtle here uſes a very ſevere expreſſion, that *if ſuch perſons fall away, it is impoſſible to renew them again to repentance*; yet I have ſhewn that there is no neceſſity of underſtanding this phraſe in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the word *impoſſible*; but as it is elſewhere uſed, for that which is *extremely difficult*. Nor indeed will our Saviour's declaration, which I mention'd before, that all ſins whatſoever are pardonable, except *the ſin againſt the holy Ghoſt*, ſuffer us to underſtand theſe words in the moſt rigorous ſenſe.

3dly, The ſin here ſpoken of, is not a partial apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion by any particular vitious practice. Whoſoever lives in the habitual practice of any ſin plainly forbidden by the chriſtian law, may be ſaid ſo far to have apoſtatiz'd from Chriſtianity; but this is not the *falling away* which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of. This may be bad enough, and the greater ſins any man who profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian lives in, the more notoriouſly he contradicts his profeſſion, and falls off from Chriſtianity, and the nearer he approaches to the ſin in the text, and the danger there threaten'd: but yet for all that, this is not that which the Apoſtle ſpeaks of.

4thly, But it is a total apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion, more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry, the renouncing of the true God, and our Saviour, and the worſhip of falſe gods, which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of. And this will be evident, if we conſider the occaſion and main ſcope of this epiſtle. And that was to confirm the *Jews*, who had newly embraced Chriſtianity, in the profeſſion of that religion; and to keep them from apoſtatizing from it, becauſe of the perſecutions and ſufferings which attended that profeſſion. It pleaſed God, when Chriſtianity firſt appeared in the world, to permit the powers of the world to raiſe a vehement perſecution againſt the profeſſors of it, by reaſon whereof many out of baſe fear did apoſtatize from it, and in teſtimony of their renouncing it, were forced to ſacrifice to the heathen idols. This is that which the Apoſtle endeavours to caution and arm men againſt throughout this epiſtle, *ch.* ii. 1. *Therefore we ought to give the more earneſt heed to the things which we have heard, leſt at any time we ſhould fall away:* And *Chap.* iii. 12. it is called *an evil heart of unbelief to apoſtatize from the living God. Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God:* that is, to fall from the worſhip of the true God to idolatry. And *Chap.* x. 23. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, not forſaking the aſſembling of our ſelves together*; that is, not declining the aſſemblies of Chriſtians, for fear of perſecution; and *v.* 26. it is call'd a *ſinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; and *v.* 29. *a drawing back to perdition.* And *ch.* xii. it is called by way of eminency, *the ſin which ſo eaſily beſets*; the ſin which in thoſe times of perſecution, they were ſo liable to.

And I doubt not but this is the ſin which St. *John* ſpeaks of, and calls *the ſin unto death*, and does not require Chriſtians *to pray for thoſe who fall into it*, with any aſſurance that it ſhall be forgiven; 1 *John* v. 16. *There is a ſin unto death: I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for it. All unrighteouſneſs is ſin; and there is a ſin not unto death. We know that whoſoever is born of God ſinneth not*; that is, does not fall into the ſin of apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity to that of the *heathen* idolatry: *But he that is begotten of God keepeth himſelf, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* And then *v.* 21. he adds this caution, *little children keep your ſelves from idols.* Which ſufficiently ſhews what that ſin was which he was ſpeaking of before.

So that this being the ſin which the Apoſtle deſign'd to caution men againſt throughout this epiſtle, it is very evident what *falling away* it is he here ſpeaks of, namely, a total apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity, and more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry.

5thly, We will conſider the reaſon of the difficulty of recovering ſuch perſons by repentance. *If they fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance*; and that for theſe *three* reaſons:

1. Becauſe of the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of the ſin.
2. Becauſe it renounceth, and caſteth off the means of recovery.
3. Becauſe it is ſo high a provocation of God to withdraw his grace from ſuch perſons.

1. Becauſe of the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of the ſin, both in the nature and circumſtances of it. It is downright apoſtaſy from God, a direct renouncing of him, and rejecting of his truth, after men have owned it, and been inwardly perſuaded and convinced of it; and ſo the Apoſtle expreſſeth it in this epiſtle, calling it an *apoſtaſy from the living God, a ſinning wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.* It hath all the aggravations that a crime is capable of, being againſt the cleareſt light and knowledge, and the fulleſt conviction of a man's mind, concerning the truth and goodneſs of that religion which he renounceth; againſt the greateſt obligations laid upon him by the grace and mercy of the Goſpel; after the free pardon of ſins, and the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Spirit received, and a miraculous power conferr'd for a witneſs and teſtimony to themſelves, of the undoubted truth of that religion which they have embraced. It is the higheſt affront to the Son of God, who revealed this religion to the world, and ſealed it with his blood; and, in effect, an expreſſion of as high malice to the author of this religion, as the *Jews* were guilty of when they put him to ſo cruel and ſhameful a death.

Now a ſin of this heinous nature is apt naturally either to plunge men into hardneſs and impenitency, or to drive them to deſpair, and either of theſe conditions are effectual bars to their recovery. And both theſe dangers the Apoſtle warns men of in this epiſtle. *Ch.* iii. 12, 13. *Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to apoſtatize from the living God: but exhort one another daily, whilſt it is call'd to day, leſt any of you be harden'd through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* Or elſe the reflection upon ſo horrid a crime is apt to drive a man to deſpair; as it did *Judas*, who after he had betray'd the *Son of God*, could find no eaſe but by making away with himſelf; the guilt of ſo great a ſin fill'd him with ſuch terrors, that he was glad to fly to death for refuge, and to lay violent hands upon himſelf. And this likewiſe was the caſe of *Spira*, whoſe apoſtaſy, though it was not total from the chriſtian religion, but only from the purity and reformation of it, brought him to that deſparation of mind which was a kind of hell upon earth. And of this danger likewiſe the Apoſtle admoniſheth, *Ch.* xii. 15. *Looking diligently, leſt any man fail of the grace of God* (or as it is in our margin, *leſt any man fall from* *the grace of God) leſt any root of bitterneſs ſpringing up trouble you*; and then he compares the caſe of ſuch perſons to *Eſau*, who when he had renounced his birthright, to which the bleſſing was annexed, was afterwards, when he would have inherited the bleſſing, rejected, and *found no place of repentance, though he ſought it carefully with tears.*

2dly, Thoſe who are guilty of this ſin, do renounce and caſt off the means of their recovery; and therefore it becomes extremely difficult *to renew them again to repentance*. They reject the Goſpel, which affords the beſt arguments and means to repentance, and renounce the only way of pardon and forgiveneſs. And certainly that man is in a very ſad and deſperate condition, the very nature of whoſe diſeaſe is to reject the remedy that ſhould cure him. And this the Apoſtle tells us, was the condition of thoſe who apoſtatized from the Goſpel, *Chap.* x. 26, 27. *For if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which ſhall devour the adverſary.* The great ſacrifice and propitiation for ſin was *the Son of God*; and they who renounce him, what way of expiation can they hope for afterward? what can they expect but to fall into his hands as a judge, whom they have rejected as a ſacrifice and a Saviour? and then,

3dly, Thoſe who are guilty of this ſin, provoke God in the higheſt manner to withdraw his grace and holy Spirit from them, by the power and efficacy whereof they ſhould be brought to repentance; ſo that it can hardly otherwiſe be expected, but that God ſhould leave thoſe to themſelves, who have ſo unworthily forſaken him; and wholly withdraw his grace and Spirit from ſuch perſons as have ſo notoriouſly *offered deſpite to the Spirit of grace.*

I do not ſay that God always does this, he is ſometimes better to ſuch perſons than they have deſerved from him, and ſaves thoſe who have done what they can to undo themſelves, and mercifully puts forth his hand to recover them who were *drawing back to perdition*; eſpecially if they were ſuddenly ſurprized by the violence of temptation, and yielded to it not deliberately and out of choice, but merely through weakneſs and infirmity, and ſo ſoon as they reflected upon themſelves, did return and repent: This was the caſe of St. *Peter*, who being ſurprized with a ſudden fear denied Chriſt; but being admoniſh'd of his ſin by the ſignal which our Saviour had given him, he was recovered by a ſpeedy and hearty repentance. And ſo likewiſe ſeveral of the primitive Chriſtians, who were at firſt overcome by fear to renounce their religion, did afterwards recover themſelves, and dy'd reſolute martyrs: but it is a very dangerous ſtate, out of which but few recover, and with great difficulty.

And thus I have done with the *five* things I propounded to make out, for the clearing of this text from the miſtakes and miſapprehenſions which have been about it. I ſhall now draw ſome uſeful inferences from hence by way of application, that we may ſee how far this doth concern ourſelves; and they ſhall be theſe:

1ſt, From the ſuppoſition here in the text, that ſuch perſons as are there deſcribed (namely, thoſe who have been baptized, and by baptiſm have received remiſſion of ſins, and did firmly believe the Goſpel, and the promiſes of it, and were endowed with miraculous gifts of the holy Ghoſt) that theſe may fall away; this ſhould caution us all againſt confidence and ſecurity; when thoſe that have gone thus far may fall, *let him that ſtandeth take heed.*

Some are of opinion, that thoſe whom the Apoſtle here deſcribes are true and ſincere Chriſtians, and that when he ſays, *It is impoſſible, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*, he means that they cannot fall away totally, ſo as to ſtand in need of being renewed again to repentance: But this is directly contrary to the Apoſtle's deſign, which was to caution Chriſtians againſt apoſtaſy, becauſe if they did fall away, their recovery would be ſo exceeding difficult; which argument does plainly ſuppoſe, that they might fall away.

On the other hand, there are others who think the perſons, here deſcribed by the Apoſtle, to be hypocritical Chriſtians, who for ſome baſe ends had entertained Chriſtianity, and put on the profeſſion of it, but not being ſincere and in good earneſt, would forſake it when perſecution came. But beſides that this is contrary to the deſcription which the Apoſtle makes of theſe perſons, who are ſaid *to have taſted of the heavenly gift, and to have been made partakers of the holy Ghoſt*; by which if we underſtand juſtification and remiſſion of ſins, and the ſanctifying virtue of the holy Ghoſt, which in all probability is the meaning of theſe phraſes, theſe are bleſſings which did not belong to hypocrites, and which God does not beſtow upon them; I ſay, beſides this, there is no reaſon to imagine that the Apoſtle intended ſuch perſons, when it is likely that there were very few hypocrites in thoſe times of perſecution; for what ſhould tempt men to diſſemble Chriſtianity, when it was ſo dangerous a profeſſion? or what worldly ends could men have in taking that profeſſion upon them, which was ſo directly contrary to their worldly intereſts?

So that upon the whole matter, I doubt not but the Apoſtle here means thoſe who are real in the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and that ſuch *might fall away.* For we may eaſily imagine, that men might be convinced of the truth and goodneſs of the *chriſtian doctrine,* and in good earneſt embrace the profeſſion of it, and yet not be ſo perfectly weaned from the world, and ſo firmly rooted and eſtabliſhed in that perſuaſion, as when it came to the trial, to be able to quit all for it, and to bear up againſt all the terrors and aſſaults of perſecution; ſo that they might be real Chriſtians, and no hypocrites, though they were not ſo perfectly eſtabliſhed and confirmed, and ſo ſincerely reſolved as many others. They were not like St. *Paul,* and thoſe tried perſons whom he ſpeaks of, *Rom.* viii. 35, 37. *Who ſhall ſeparate us from the love of Chriſt? ſhall tribulation, or diſtreſs, or perſecution, or famine, or nakedneſs, or peril, or ſword? Nay, in all theſe things we are more than conquerors.* (They had been tried by all theſe, and yet had held out) upon which he breaks out into thoſe triumphant expreſſions; *I am perſuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things preſent, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, ſhall be able to ſeparate us from the love of God, which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.* They might not (I ſay) be like thoſe: and yet for all that be real in their profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and no hypocrites.

In ſhort, I take them to be ſuch as our Saviour deſcribes him to be, *who received the ſeed into ſtony places,* namely, *he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while, for when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word, by and by he is offended.* This is no deſcription of a hypocrite; but of one that was real, as far as he went (for he is ſaid *to receive the word with joy)* but was not well rooted, and come to ſuch a confirmed ſtate, as reſolutely to withſtand the aſſaults of perſecution.

So that tho' we have truly embraced Chriſtianity, and are in a good degree ſincere in the profeſſion of it, yet there is great reaſon why we ſhould neither be *ſecure nor confident in ourſelves.* Not *ſecure,* becauſe there is great danger that our reſolutions may be borne down one time or other by the aſſaults of temptation, if we be not continually vigilant, and upon our guard. Not *confident in ourſelves;* becauſe *we ſtand by faith, and faith is the gift of God,* therefore as the Apoſtle infers, *we ſhould not be high-minded, but fear.* Men may have gone a great way in Chriſtianity, and have been ſincere in the profeſſion of it; and yet afterwards may apoſtatize in the fouleſt manner, not only fall off to a vicious life, but even deſert the profeſſion of their religion. I would to God the experience of the world did not give us too much reaſon to believe the poſſibility of this. When we ſee ſo many revolt from the profeſſion of the reformed religion, to the corruptions and ſuperſtitions of *Rome;* and others from a religious and ſober life, to plunge themſelves into all kind of lewdneſs and debauchery, and it is to be feared, into atheiſm and infidelity; can we doubt any longer whether it be poſſible for Chriſtians to fall away? I wiſh we were as certain of the poſſibility of their recovery, as we are of their falling, and that we had as many examples of the one as of the other.

Let us then be very vigilant over ourſelves, and according to the Apoſtle's exhortation, 2 *Pet.* iii. 17. *Seeing we know theſe things before, beware, leſt we alſo being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own ſtedfaſtneſs.*

2*dly,* This ſhews us how great an aggravation it is, for men to ſin againſt the means of knowledge which the Goſpel affords, and the mercies which it offers unto them. That which aggravated the ſin of theſe perſons was, that after they *were once enlighten'd,* that is, at their baptiſm were inſtructed in the chriſtian doctrine, the cleareſt and moſt perfect revelation that ever was made of God's will to mankind, that after they were *juſtified freely by God's Grace,* and had received remiſſion of ſins, and had many other benefits conferred upon them; that after all this, they ſhould fall off from this *holy religion.* This was that which did ſo heighten and enflame their guilt, and made their caſe ſo near deſperate. The two great aggravations of crimes are wilfulneſs and ingratitude; if a crime be wilfully committed, and committed againſt one that hath obliged us by the greateſt favours and benefits. Now he commits a fault wilfully, who does it againſt the clear knowledge of his duty. Ignorance excuſeth; for ſo far as a man is ignorant of the evil he does, ſo far the action is involuntary: but knowledge makes it to be a wilful fault. And this is a more peculiar aggravation of the ſins of Chriſtians, becauſe God hath afforded them the greateſt means and opportunities of knowledge; that revelation which God hath made of his will to the world by our bleſſed Saviour, is the cleareſt light that ever mankind had, and the mercies which the Goſpel brings are the greateſt that ever were offer'd to the ſons of men; the free pardon and remiſſion of all our ſins, and the aſſiſtance of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to help the weakneſs of our nature, and enable us to do what God requires of us. So that we who ſin after baptiſm, after the knowledge of Chriſtianity, and thoſe great bleſſings which the Goſpel beſtows on mankind, are of all perſons in the world the moſt inexcuſable. The ſins of heathens bear no proportion to ours, becauſe they never enjoyed thoſe means of knowledge, never had thoſe bleſſings conferred upon them, which Chriſtians are partakers of; ſo that we may apply to ourſelves thoſe ſevere words of the Apoſtle in this epiſtle, *how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?* Hear how our Saviour aggravates the faults of men upon this account, of the wilfulneſs of them, and their being committed againſt the expreſs knowledge of God's will: *Luke* xii. 47, 48. *The ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: for unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will aſk the more.* The means and mercies of the Goſpel are ſo many talents committed to our truſt, of the neglect whereof a ſevere account will be taken at the day of judgment. If we be wilful offenders, there is no excuſe for us, and little hopes of pardon. *If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth* (ſays the Apoſtle in this epiſtle) *there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin.* I know the Apoſtle ſpeaks this particularly of the ſin of *Apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity*; but it is in proportion true of all other ſins, which thoſe who have received the knowledge of the truth are guilty of. They, who after they have entertained Chriſtianity, and made ſome progreſs in it, and been in ſome meaſure reformed by it, do again relapſe into any vicious courſe, do thereby render their condition very dangerous. So St. *Peter* tells us, 2 *Pet.* ii. 20, 21. *If after they have eſcaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* Therefore we may do well to conſider ſeriouſly what we do, when under the means and opportunities of knowledge which the Goſpel affords us, and the ineſtimable bleſſings and favours which it confers upon us, we live in any wicked and vicious courſe. Our ſins are not of a common rate, when they have ſo much of wilfulneſs and unworthineſs in them. If men ſhall be ſeverely puniſh'd for living againſt the light of nature; what vengeance ſhall be poured on thoſe who offend againſt the glorious light of the Goſpel? *This is the condemnation, that light is come,* &c.

3dly, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid is matter of comfort to thoſe, who upon every failing and infirmity are afraid they have committed *the unpardonable ſin,* and that it is impoſſible for them to be reſtored by repentance. There are many, who being of a dark and melancholy temper, are apt to repreſent things worſe to themſelves than there is reaſon for, and do many times fancy themſelves guilty of great crimes, in the doing or neglecting of thoſe things which in their nature are indifferent, and are apt to aggravate and blow up every little infirmity into an unpardonable ſin. Moſt men are apt to extenuate their ſins, and not to be ſenſible enough of the evil and heinouſneſs of them; but it is the peculiar infelicity of melancholy perſons to look upon their faults as blacker and greater than in truth they are; and whatſoever they hear and read in Scripture, that is ſpoken againſt the groſſeſt and moſt enormous offenders, they apply to themſelves; and when they hear of the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, and the ſin unto death,* or read this text which I am now treating of, they preſently conclude that they are guilty of theſe ſins, and that this is a deſcription of their caſe. Whereas *the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is of that nature, that probably none but thoſe that ſaw our Saviour's miracles are capable of committing it; and excepting *that,* there is no ſin whatſoever that is unpardonable. As for *the ſin unto death,* and *that* here ſpoken of in the text, I have ſhewn that they are a total Apoſtaſy from the *chriſtian religion,* more eſpecially to the heathen idolatry; which theſe perſons I am ſpeaking of, have no reaſon to imagine themſelves guilty of. And though great and notorious crimes committed by Chriſtians may come near to this, and it may be very hard for thoſe who are guilty of them, to recover themſelves again to repentance; yet to be ſure, for the common frailties and infirmities of human nature, there is an open way of pardon in the Goſpel, and they are many times forgiven to us upon a general repentance; ſo that upon account of theſe, which is commonly the caſe of the perſons I am ſpeaking of, there is not the leaſt ground of deſpair; and tho' it be hard many times for ſuch perſons to receive comfort, yet it is eaſy to give it, and that upon ſure grounds, and as clear evidence of Scripture, as there is for any thing; ſo that the firſt thing that ſuch perſons, who are ſo apt to judge thus hardly of themſelves, are to be convinced of (if poſſible) is this, that they ought rather to truſt the judgment of others concerning themſelves, than their own imagination, which is ſo diſtemper'd, that it cannot make a true repreſentation of things. I know that where melancholy does mightily prevail, it is hard to perſuade people of this: but till they be perſuaded of it, I am ſure all the reaſon in the world will ſignify nothing to them.

4thly, This ſhould make men afraid of great and preſumptuous ſins, which come near Apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity; ſuch as deliberate murder, adultery, groſs fraud and oppreſſion, or notorious and habitual intemperance. For what great difference is there, whether men renounce Chriſtianity; or profeſſing to believe it, *do in their works deny it?* Some of theſe ſins which I have mention'd, particularly murder and adultery, were ranked in the ſame degree with Apoſtaſy by the antient church; and ſo ſevere was the diſcipline of many churches, that perſons guilty of theſe crimes were never admitted to the peace and communion of the church again, whatever teſtimony they gave of their repentance. I will not ſay but this was too rigorous; but this ſhews how inconſiſtent with Chriſtianity theſe crimes, and others of the like degree of heinouſneſs, were in thoſe days thought to be. They did not indeed, as *Tertullian* tells us, think ſuch perſons abſolutely incapable of the mercy of God; but after ſuch a fall, ſo notorious a contradiction to their chriſtian profeſſion, they thought it unfit afterwards that they ſhould ever be reckon'd in the number of Chriſtians.

5thly, It may be uſeful for us upon this occaſion to reflect a little upon the antient diſcipline of the church, which in ſome places (as I have told you) was ſo ſevere, as in caſe of ſome great crimes after baptiſm, as Apoſtaſy to the heathen idolatry, murder and adultery, never to admit thoſe that were guilty of them, to the peace and communion of the church; but all churches were ſo ſtrict, as not to admit thoſe who fell after baptiſm into great and notorious crimes, to reconciliation with the church, but after a long and tedious courſe of penance, after the greateſt and moſt publick teſtimonies of ſorrow and repentance, after long faſting and tears, and the greateſt ſigns of humiliation that can be imagined. In caſe of the greateſt offences they were ſeldom reconciled, till they came to lie upon their death-beds: and in caſe of other ſcandalous ſins, not till after the humiliation of many years. This perhaps may be thought too great ſeverity; but I am ſure we are as much too remiſs now, as they were over-rigorous then: but were the antient diſcipline of the church in any degree put in practice now, what caſe would the generality of Chriſtians be in? In what herds and ſhoals would men be driven out of the communion of the church? 'Tis true, the prodigious degeneracy and corruption of Chriſtians hath long ſince broke theſe bounds, and 'tis morally impoſſible to revive the ſtrictneſs of the antient diſcipline in any meaſure, till the world grow better; but yet we ought to reflect, with ſhame and confuſion of face, upon the purer ages of the church, and ſadly to conſider, how few among us would in thoſe days have been accounted Chriſtians; and upon this conſideration to be provoked to an emulation of thoſe better times, and to a reformation of thoſe faults and miſcarriages, which in the beſt days of Chriſtianity were reckon'd inconſiſtent with the chriſtian profeſſion; and to remember that though the diſcipline of the church be not now the ſame it was then, yet the judgment and ſeverity of God is; and that thoſe who live in any vicious courſe of life, though they continue in the communion of the church, yet they ſhall be *ſhut out of the kingdom of God. We are ſure that the judgment of God will be according to truth, againſt them which commit ſuch things.*

6thly, and *laſtly*, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid, ſhould confirm and eſtabliſh us in the profeſſion of our holy religion. 'Tis true, we are not now in danger of apoſtatizing from Chriſtianity to the heathen idolatry; but we have too many ſad examples of thoſe who apoſtatize from the profeſſion of the Goſpel, which they have taken upon them in baptiſm, to atheiſm and infidelity, to all manner of impiety and lewdneſs. There are many who daily fall off from the profeſſion of the *reformed religion*, to the groſs errors and ſuperſtitions of the *Roman* church, which in many things does too nearly reſemble the old Pagan Idolatry. And what the Apoſtle here ſays of the Apoſtates of his time, is proportionably true of thoſe of our days, that *they who thus fall away*, it is *extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance.* And it ought to be remember'd, that the guilt of this kind of Apoſtaſy hath driven ſome to deſpair; as in the caſe of *Spira*, who, for reſiſting the light and convictions of his mind, was caſt into thoſe agonies, and fill'd with ſuch terrors, as if *the very pains of hell had taken hold on him*; and in that fearful deſpair, and in the midſt of thoſe horrors, he breathed out his ſoul.

Let us then hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering; and let us take heed how we contradict the profeſſion of our faith, by any impiety and wickedneſs in our lives; remembring that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* I will conclude with the words of the Apoſtle immediately after the text, *The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth bleſſing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto curſing, whoſe end is to be burned.* And how gladly would I add the next words! *But beloved, we are perſuaded better things of you, and things that accompany ſalvation, tho' we thus ſpeak.*

SERMON LXVIII.

Chriſt the Author, and Obedience the Condition of Salvation.

HEB. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey him.

THIS is ſpoken of Chriſt, our great High-prieſt under the Goſpel; upon the excellency of whoſe perſon, and the efficacy of his ſacrifice for the eternal benefit and ſalvation of mankind, the Apoſtle inſiſts ſo largely in this, and the following chapters; but the ſum of all is briefly comprehended in the text, that our High-prieſt *being made perfect, became the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

In which words we have theſe four things conſiderable:

1ſt, The great bleſſing and benefit here ſpoken of, and that is *eternal ſalvation*; and this implies in it, not only our deliverance from hell, and redemption from eternal miſery; but the obtaining of eternal life and happineſs for us.

2dly, The author of this great bleſſing and benefit to mankind; and that is *Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God*; who is here repreſented to us under the notion of our *High-prieſt*, who by making atonement for us, and reconciling us to God, is ſaid to be the *author of eternal ſalvation* to mankind.

3dly, The way and means whereby he became the author of our ſalvation; *being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation.* The word is τελειωθεὶς, having conſummated his work, and finiſh'd his courſe, and received the reward of it. For this word hath an alluſion to thoſe that run in a race, where he that wins receives the crown. And to this the Apoſtle plainly alludes, *Phil.* iii. 12. where he ſays, *not as though I had already attained*, οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον, not as if I had already taken hold of the prize; but I am preſſing, or reaching forward towards it; ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, or were already perfect; that is, not as if I had finiſh'd my courſe, or had the prize or crown in my hand; but I am preſſing forward towards it. In like manner, our bleſſed Saviour, when he had finiſh'd the courſe of his humiliation and obedience, which was accompliſh'd in his ſufferings, and had receiv'd the reward of them, being riſen from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, and crown'd with glory and honour, he is ſaid to be τελειωθεὶς made perfect; and therefore when he was giving up the ghoſt upon the croſs, he ſaid, *John* xix. 30.

τετέλεσται, *it is finiſh'd*, or perfected; that is, he had done all that was neceſſary to be done, by way of ſuffering, for our redemption. And the ſame word is likewiſe uſed *Luke* xiii. 32. concerning our Saviour's ſufferings, *I do cures to-day and to-morrow*, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι, *and the third day I ſhall be perfected*; this he ſpake concerning his own death. And therefore, *ch.* ii. 10. God is ſaid *to make the captain of our ſalvation perfect through ſufferings*; διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι. And thus our High-prieſt being *made perfect* in this ſenſe, that is, having finiſh'd his courſe, which was accompliſhed in his ſufferings, and having received the reward of them, in being exalted at the right hand of God, *he became the author of eternal ſalvation to us.*

4thly, You have here the qualification of the perſons who are made partakers of this great benefit, or the condition upon which it is ſuſpended, and that is *obedience*; *he became the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

Theſe are the main things contained in the text. For the fuller explication whereof, I ſhall take into conſideration theſe five things:

1ſt, How and by what means Chriſt is the *author of our ſalvation.*

2dly, What *obedience* the Goſpel requires as a condition, and is pleaſed to accept as a qualification, in thoſe who hope for eternal ſalvation.

3dly, We will conſider the *poſſibility* of performing this condition, by that grace and aſſiſtance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the Goſpel.

4thly, The *neceſſity* of this *obedience*, in order to eternal life and happineſs.

And *5thly*, I ſhall ſhew that this is no prejudice to the *law of faith*, and the *free grace and mercy* of God, declared in the Goſpel.

1ſt, We will conſider how and by what means *Chriſt is the author of our ſalvation*; and this is contain'd in theſe words, *being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation*; that is (as I told you before) having finiſh'd his courſe which was accompliſh'd in his laſt ſufferings; and having received the reward of them, being exalted at the right hand of God, he became the *author of eternal ſalvation* to us; ſo that by all he did, and ſuffer'd for us, in the days of his fleſh, and in the ſtate of his humiliation, and by all that he ſtill continues to do for us, now that he is in heaven at the right hand of God; he hath effected and brought about the great work of our ſalvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and ſufferings, his reſurrection from the dead, and his powerful interceſſion for us at the right hand of God, have all a great influence upon the reforming and ſaving of mankind; and by all theſe ways and means, he is *the author* and cauſe *of our ſalvation*; as a rule, and as a pattern, as a price and propitiation, and as a patron and advocate that is continually pleading our cauſe, and interceding with God on our behalf, *for mercy and grace to help in time of need.*

And indeed our condition requir'd an high-prieſt who was qualified in all theſe reſpects, for the recovery of mankind out of that corrupt and degenerate ſtate into which it was ſunk; an high-prieſt *whoſe lips ſhould preſerve knowledge*, and from whoſe mouth we might learn the law of God; whoſe life ſhould be a perfect pattern of holineſs to us, and his death a propitiation for the ſins of the whole world; and by whoſe grace and aſſiſtance we ſhould be endowed with power and ſtrength to mortify our luſts, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God; and therefore *ſuch an high-prieſt became us, who was holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparate from ſinners, who might have compaſſion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and being himſelf compaſs'd with infirmities, might have the feeling of ours, being in all points tempted as we are, only without ſin*; and in a word, *might be able to ſave to the utmoſt all thoſe that come to God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for us.*

By theſe qualifications our high-prieſt is deſcribed in this epiſtle; and by theſe he is every way ſuited to all our defects and infirmities, all our wants and neceſſities; to inſtruct our ignorance by his doctrine, and to lead us in the path of righteouſneſs by his moſt holy and moſt exemplary life; to expiate the guilt of our ſins by his death; and to procure grace and aſſiſtance for us, by his prevalent interceſſion on our behalf. By all theſe ways, and in all theſe reſpects, he is ſaid to be *the author of eternal ſalvation.*

1ſt, By the holineſs and purity of his doctrine, whereby we are perfectly inſtructed in the will of God and our duty, and powerfully excited and perſuaded to the practice of it. The rules and directions of a holy life were very obſcure before, and the motives and encouragements to virtue but weak and ineffectual, in compariſon of what they are now render'd by the revelation of the Goſpel. The general corruption of mankind, and the vicious practice of the world, had in a great meaſure blurr'd and defac'd the natural law;

ſo that the heathen world, for many ages, had but a very dark and doubtful knowledge of their duty, eſpecially as to ſeveral inſtances of it. The cuſtom of ſeveral vices had ſo prevail'd among mankind, as almoſt quite to extinguiſh the natural ſenſe of their evil and deformity. And the *Jews*, who enjoy'd a conſiderable degree of *divine revelation*, had no ſtrict regard to the morality of their actions; and contenting themſelves with ſome kind of outward conformity to the bare *letter* of the ten commandments, were almoſt wholly taken up with little ceremonies and obſervances, in which they placed the main of their religion, almoſt wholly neglecting the greater duties *and weightier matters of the law.*

And therefore our bleſſed Saviour, to free mankind from theſe wanderings and uncertainties about the will of God, revealed the moral law, and explained the full force and meaning of it, clearing all doubts, and ſupplying all the defects of it, by a more particular and explicit declaration of the ſeveral parts of our duty, and by precepts of greater perfection, than the world was ſufficiently acquainted withal before; of greater humility and more univerſal charity; of abſtaining from revenge and forgiving injuries, and returning to our enemies good for evil, and love for ill-will, and bleſſings and prayers for curſes and perſecutions. Theſe virtues indeed were ſometimes, and yet but very rarely, recommended before in the counſels of wiſe men; but either not in that degree of perfection, or not under that degree of neceſſity, and as having the force of laws, and laying an univerſal obligation of indiſpenſible duty upon all mankind.

And as our bleſſed Saviour hath given a greater clearneſs, and certainty, and perfection, to the rule of our duty, ſo he hath reveal'd, and brought into a clearer light, more powerful motives and encouragements to the conſtant and careful practice of it; for *life and immortality are brought to light by the Goſpel*; the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead being a plain and convincing demonſtration of the *immortality of our ſouls*, and another life after this, and an evidence to us both of his power, and of the fidelity of his promiſe, to raiſe us from the dead. Not but that mankind had ſome obſcure apprehenſions of theſe things before. Good men had always good hopes of another life, and future rewards in another world; and the worſt of men were not without ſome fears of the judgment and vengeance of another world; but men had diſputed themſelves into great doubts and uncertainties about theſe things; and as men that are in doubt, and almoſt indifferent which way they go; ſo the uncertain apprehenſions which men had of a future ſtate, and of the rewards and puniſhments of another world, had but a very faint influence upon the minds of men, and wanted that preſſing and determining force to virtue and a good life, which a firm belief and clear conviction of theſe things, would have infuſed into them.

But now *the light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt* hath ſcatter'd all theſe clouds, and chaſed away that groſs darkneſs which hid the other world from our ſight, and hath removed all doubts concerning the immortality of mens ſouls, and their future ſtate; and now *the kingdom of heaven*, with all its treaſures of life, and happineſs, and glory, lies open to our view, and *hell is alſo naked before us, and deſtruction hath no covering.* So that the hopes and fears of men are now perfectly awaken'd, and all ſorts of conſiderations that may ſerve to quicken and encourage our obedience, and to deter and affrighten men from a wicked life, are expoſed to the view of all men, and do ſtare every man's conſcience in the face. And this is that which renders the Goſpel ſo admirable and powerful an inſtrument for the reforming of mankind, and, as the Apoſtle calls it, the *mighty power of God unto ſalvation*; becauſe therein life and immortality are ſet before us, as the certain and glorious reward of our obedience; and *therein* alſo *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men.* So that conſidering the perfection of our rule, and the powerful enforcements of it upon the conſciences of men, by the clear diſcovery and firm aſſurance of the eternal recompence of another world; nothing can be imagin'd better ſuited to its end, than the doctrine of the Goſpel is to make men wiſe, and holy, and good unto ſalvation; both by inſtructing them perfectly in their duty, and urging them powerfully to the practice of it.

2dly, The example of our Saviour's life is likewiſe another excellent means to this end. The law lays an obligation upon us; but a pattern gives life and encouragement, and renders our duty more eaſy, and practicable, and familiar to us; for here we ſee obedience to the divine law practiſed in our own nature, and performed by a man like our ſelves, *in all things like unto us, ſin only excepted.* 'Tis true indeed, this exception makes a great difference, and ſeems to take off very much from the encouraging force and virtue of this *example.* No wonder if he that was without ſin, and was God as well as man, perform'd all righteouſneſs; and therefore, where is the encouragement of this *example*? That our nature, pure and uncorrupted, ſupported and aſſiſted by the divinity to which it was united, ſhould be perfectly conformed to the law of God, as it is no ſtrange thing, ſo neither doth it ſeem to have that force and encouragement in it, which an example more ſuited to our weakneſs might have had. But then this cannot be deny'd, that it hath the advantage of perfection, which a pattern ought to have, and to which, though we can never attain, yet we may always be aſpiring towards it; and certainly we cannot better learn, how God would have men to live, than by ſeeing how God himſelf lived, when he was pleaſed to aſſume our nature, and to become man.

And then, we are to conſider that the Son of God did not aſſume our nature in its higheſt glory and perfection, but compaſs'd with infirmities, and liable in all points to be tempted like as we are; but ſtill it was without ſin; and therefore God doth not exact from us perfect obedience, and that we ſhould *fulfil all righteouſneſs*, as *he* did; he makes allowance for the corruption of our nature, and is pleaſed to accept of our ſincere, tho' very imperfect obedience. But after all this, his *human nature* was united to the *divinity*, and he had the *Spirit without meaſure*; and this would indeed make a wide difference between us and our *pattern*, as to the purpoſe of holineſs and obedience, if we were deſtitute of that aſſiſtance which is neceſſary to enable us to the diſcharge of our duty; but this God offers, and is ready to afford to us, for he hath promiſed *to give his holy Spirit to them that aſk him*; and *the Spirit of him that raiſed up Chriſt Jeſus from the dead* dwells in all good men, who ſincerely deſire to do the will of God; *in the working out our ſalvation, God worketh in us both to will and to do.*

So that as to that obedience which the Goſpel requires of us, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, if we do not *receive the grace of God in vain*, and *quench and reſiſt his bleſſed Spirit*, we may be as really aſſiſted as *the Son of God* himſelf was; for, in this reſpect, all true and ſincere Chriſtians are *the ſons of God*; ſo that St. *Paul* tells us, *Rom.* viii. 14. *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the ſons of God.*

So that if all things be duly conſider'd, the life of our bleſſed Saviour, as it is the moſt perfect, ſo in the main, it is a very proper *pattern* for our imitation, and could not have come nearer to us, without wanting that perfection which is neceſſary to a compleat and abſolute pattern. *The Son of God* condeſcended to every thing that might render him the moſt familiar and equal example to us, excepting *that*, which as it was impoſſible, ſo had been infinitely diſhonourable to him, and would have ſpoil'd the perfection of his example; he came as near to us as was fit or poſſible, *being in all things like unto us, ſin only excepted*; that is, abating that one thing, which he came to deſtroy and aboliſh, and which would have deſtroyed the very end of his coming; for if he had not been *without ſin*; he could neither have made an *expiation* for ſin, nor have been a perfect *pattern* of holineſs and obedience.

And as the life of our bleſſed Saviour had all the perfection that is requiſite to an *abſolute pattern* (ſo that by conſidering his temper and ſpirit, and the actions of his life, we may reform all the vicious inclinations of our minds, and the exorbitances of our paſſions, and the errors and irregularities of our lives) ſo it is a very *powerful example*, and of great force to oblige and provoke us to the imitation of it; for it is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and have reaſon to love, above any perſon in the world: The example of our Prince and ſovereign Lord, of our beſt friend and greateſt benefactor, of the High-prieſt of our profeſſion, and the Captain of our ſalvation, of the author and finiſher of our faith, of one who came down from heaven for our ſakes, and was contented to aſſume our nature together with the infirmities of it, and to live in a low and mean condition, for no other reaſon but that he might have the opportunity to inſtruct and lead mankind in the way to life, to deliver us from ſin and wrath, and to bring us to God and happineſs. 'Tis the example of one who laid down his life for us, and ſealed his love to us in his blood, and whilſt we were enemies, did and ſuffer'd more for us, than ever any man did for his friend.

And ſurely theſe conſiderations cannot but mightily recommend and endear to us this *example of our Lord and Saviour.* We are ambitious to imitate thoſe whom we highly eſteem and reverence, and are apt to have their examples in great veneration, from whom we have received great kindneſſes and benefits, and are always endeavouring to be like thoſe whom we love, and are apt to conform ourſelves to the will and pleaſure of thoſe from whom we have received great favours, and who are continually heaping great obligations upon us.

So that whether we conſider the excellency of our pattern, or the mighty endearments of it to us, by that infinite love and kindneſs which he hath expreſs'd towards us, we have all the temptation, and all the provocation in the world, to endeavour to be like him; for who would not gladly tread in the ſteps of *the Son of God*, and of the beſt friend that the ſons of men ever had? Who would not follow *that example* to which we ſtand indebted for the greateſt bleſſings and benefits that ever were procured for mankind? Thus you ſee of what force and advantage the *example* of our bleſſed Saviour is toward the recovery and ſalvation of mankind.

3*dly*, He is *the Author of eternal ſalvation*, as he hath purchaſed it for us, by the *merit of his obedience and ſufferings*, by which he hath obtained eternal redemption for us; not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but eternal life and happineſs. When by our ſins we had juſtly incurr'd the wrath and diſpleaſure of Almighty God, and were liable to eternal death and miſery, he was contented to be ſubſtituted a ſacrifice for us, *to bear our ſins in his own body on the tree*, and to expiate the guilt of all our offences by his own ſufferings. He died *for us*, that is, not only for our benefit and advantage, but in our place and ſtead: ſo that if he had not died we had eternally periſh'd; and becauſe he died, we are ſaved from that eternal ruin and puniſhment, which was due to us for our ſins.

And this, tho' it be no where in Scripture call'd by the name or term of *ſatisfaction*, yet, which is the ſame thing in effect, it is call'd *the price of our redemption*; for as we are ſinners, we are liable and indebted to the juſtice of God, and our bleſſed Saviour by his death and ſufferings hath diſcharged this obligation; which diſcharge, ſince it was obtained for us by *the ſhedding of his precious blood, without which*, the Scripture expreſſly ſays, *there had been no remiſſion of ſin*, why it may not properly enough be called *payment* and *ſatisfaction*, I confeſs I cannot underſtand. Not that God was angry with his Son, for he was always well pleaſed with him; or that our Saviour ſuffer'd the very ſame which the ſinner ſhould have done in his own perſon, the proper pains and torments of the damned; but that his perfect obedience and grievous ſufferings, undergone for our ſakes, and upon our account, were of that value and eſteem with God, and his voluntary ſacrifice of himſelf in our ſtead, ſo highly acceptable and well pleaſing to him, that he thereupon was pleaſed to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind; wherein he hath promiſed and engaged himſelf to forgive the ſins of all thoſe who ſincerely repent and believe, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence it is, that the blood of Chriſt, which was ſhed for us upon the croſs, is call'd *the blood of the covenant*; as being the ſanction of that new covenant of the Goſpel, into which God is enter'd with mankind; and not only the confirmation, but the very foundation of it; for which reaſon, the cup in the Lord's Supper (which repreſents to us the blood of Chriſt) is call'd *the New Teſtament in his blood, which was ſhed for many for the remiſſion of ſins*.

4*thly*, and *laſtly*, Chriſt is ſaid to be *the Author of our ſalvation*, in reſpect of his powerful and perpetual *interceſſion* for us at the right hand of God. And this ſeems to be more eſpecially intimated and intended, in that expreſſion here in the text, that *being made perfect he became the Author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*. Which words of *his being perfected*, do, as I have ſhew'd before, more immediately refer to his ſufferings, and the reward that followed them, *his exaltation at the right hand of God*, where *he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us*; by which perpetual and moſt prevalent *interceſſion* of his, he procures all thoſe benefits to be beſtowed upon us, which he purchaſed for us by his death; the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and our acceptance with God, and perfect reſtitution to his favour, upon our faith and repentance, and the grace and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit to enable us to a ſincere diſcharge of our duty, to ſtrengthen us againſt all the temptations of the world, the fleſh, and the Devil, to keep us from all evil, and to preſerve us to his heavenly kingdom.

And this is that which our Apoſtle calls *obtaining of mercy, and finding grace to help in time of need*, ch. iv. v. 16. of this Epiſt. Our bleſſed Saviour, now that he is advanced into heaven, and *exalted on the right hand of the Majeſty on high*, doth out of the tendereſt affection and compaſſion to mankind, ſtill proſecute that great and merciful deſign of our ſalvation which was begun by him here on earth, and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and ſufferings does offer up our prayers to God, and as it were plead our cauſe with God, and repreſent to him all our wants and neceſſities, and obtain a favourable anſwer of our petitions put up to God in his name, and all neceſſary ſupplies of grace and ſtrength, proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And by virtue of this powerful *interceſſion* of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer, our ſins are pardoned upon our ſincere repentance, our prayers are graciouſly anſwered, our wants are abundantly ſupplied, and the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Spirit are plentifully afforded to us, to excite us to our duty, to ſtrengthen us in well doing, to comfort us in afflictions, to ſupport us under the greateſt trials and ſufferings, and *to keep us through faith unto ſalvation*.

And for this reaſon, as the purchaſing of our ſalvation is in Scripture attributed to the death and ſufferings of Chriſt; ſo the perfecting and finiſhing of it is aſcribed to the prevalency of his interceſſion at the right hand of God for us. So the Apoſtle tells us, *ch.* vii. 25. that *he is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him; ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for us.* He died once to purchaſe ſalvation for us; and that we may not fall ſhort of it, but receive the full benefit of this purchaſe, *he lives for ever to make interceſſion for us*, and thus *he ſaves to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him*; that is, he takes care of the whole buſineſs of our ſalvation from firſt to laſt. And now that he is in heaven, he is as intent to procure our welfare and happineſs, and as tenderly concerned for us, as when he lived here among us upon earth, as when he hung upon the croſs, and *poured out his ſoul an offering for our ſins*; for he appears at the right hand of God in our nature; that which he aſſumed for our ſakes, which was made ſubject to, and ſenſible of our infirmities, and which *was tempted in all things like as we are, only without ſin*; and therefore *he knows how to pity* and ſuccour *them that are tempted*; and from the remembrance of his own ſufferings, is prompted to a compaſſionate ſenſe of ours, and never ceaſeth in virtue of his blood, which was ſhed for us, to plead our cauſe with God, and to intercede powerfully in our behalf.

So that the virtue and efficacy of Chriſt's *interceſſion* on our behalf, is founded in the redemption, which he wrought for us, by his blood and ſufferings; which, being enter'd into heaven, he repreſents to God on our behalf. As the High-prieſt under the law did enter into the holy place, with the blood of the ſacrifice that had been offered, and in virtue of that blood interceded for the people; *ſo Chriſt by his own blood enter'd into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*; as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *ch.* ix. *v.* 12. He enter'd into *the holy place*, that is, *into heaven itſelf*, to make *interceſſion* for us, as the Apoſtle explains himſelf, *v.* 24. *Chriſt is not enter'd into the holy places which are made with hands; but into heaven itſelf, to appear in the preſence of God for us.* And *ch.* x. *v.* 12. ſpeaking of Chriſt's appearing for us at the right hand of God, *this man* (ſays he) *after he had offer'd one ſacrifice for ſin for ever* (that is, a ſacrifice of perpetual virtue and efficacy) *ſat down at the right hand of God*, that is, to intercede for us in virtue of that ſacrifice.

From all which it appears that the virtue of Chriſt's mediation and interceſſion for us in heaven, is founded in his ſacrifice, and the price of our redemption which he paid on earth, in ſhedding his blood for us.

From whence the Apoſtle reaſons, that *there is but one Mediator between God and man*, by whom we are to addreſs our prayers to God; 1 Tim. ii. 5. *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus, who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.* His mediation is founded in his ranſom, or the price which he paid for our redemption. The Apoſtle indeed does not ſay there is *but one Mediator* between God and man in expreſs words, but ſurely he means ſo; if by ſaying *there is one God*, he means there is *but one God*, for they are joined together, and the very ſame expreſſion uſed concerning both; *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men*: that is, there is *but one God*, and *one Mediator*. But then, they of the church of *Rome* endeavour to avoid this plain text, by diſtinguiſhing between a *Mediator* of *redemption*, and a *Mediator* of *interceſſion*: But now if Chriſt's *mediation*, by way of *interceſſion*, be founded in the virtue of his *redemption*; then if there be but *one Mediator* of *redemption*, then there is but *one Mediator* of *interceſſion* in heaven for us. *There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Chriſt Jeſus, who gave himſelf a ranſom for all.* So that the power and prevalency of his *interceſſion* is founded in his *ranſom*, that is, *the price of our redemption*; in virtue whereof alone he intercedes with God for us, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* does moſt plainly aſſert. So that all other interceſſors in heaven for us are excluded from offering and preſenting our prayers to God, beſides *our high-prieſt, who is at the right hand of God, and lives for ever, to make interceſſion for us*, and by virtue of his *interceſſion is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all thoſe that come to God by him*, that is, who put up their prayers to God in the alone virtue of his *mediation*. So that as there is no need of any other, if his *inter-*

ceſſion be available *to ſave to the uttermoſt:* ſo there is great danger in applying to any other (whether Saint or Angel, or even the bleſſed Virgin) if the benefit of his *interceſſion* be limited to thoſe *who come to God by him.* And thus I have ſhewn by what means Chriſt is *the Author of our ſalvation*; which was the *firſt* thing propos'd to be conſider'd. I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed to enquire into; namely, what *obedience* the Goſpel requires as a condition, and is pleaſed to accept as a qualification, in thoſe who hope for *eternal ſalvation*. And this I ſhall explain, firſt *negatively*, and then *poſitively*.

1ſt, Negatively; It is not a meer outward profeſſion of the *chriſtian religion*, and owning of Chriſt for our Lord and law-giver, that will be accepted in this caſe. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord,* (ſaith our Saviour) *ſhall enter into the kingdom of God.* By which we may very reaſonably underſtand, all that profeſſion of religion, which falls ſhort of *obedience* and a *holy life*; as the profeſſion of faith in Chriſt, being baptized into his name and religion, the mere belief of his doctrine, and the owning of him for our Lord and Saviour; no, nor the external worſhip of him, and profeſſion of ſubjection to him, by prayer and hearing his word and communicating in the holy Sacrament. No, though this be ſet off in the moſt glorious manner, by propheſying and working miracles in his name; for ſo it follows in the next words, *Many ſhall ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name, and in thy name have caſt out Devils, and in thy name have done many wondrous works? We have eat and drunk in thy preſence, and have heard thee preach in our ſtreets.* But he tells us, that nothing of all this, without obedience to his laws, will be ſufficient to gain us admiſſion into heaven.

2dly, Poſitively; That which God requires as a condition, and will accept as a qualification, in thoſe who hope for eternal life, is faith in Chriſt, and a ſincere and univerſal obedience to the precepts of his holy Goſpel. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of God: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* And here in the text it is expreſly ſaid, that *Chriſt is the Author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*, τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ, to them that hearken to him; that is, to them that do ſo hear and believe his Goſpel, as to obey it; to them, and no other, he is *the Author of eternal ſalvation.*

And that we may the more clearly and diſtinctly underſtand what *obedience* it is, which the Goſpel exacts as an indiſpenſable condition of *eternal ſalvation*, and a neceſſary qualification in all thoſe who hope to be made partakers of it; we may be pleaſed to conſider, that there is a *virtual* and an *actual* obedience to the laws of God; a *perfect* and *ſincere* obedience to them; the explication of theſe terms, will give us a diſtinct conception of the things we are ſpeaking of.

1ſt. There is a *virtual*, and there is an *actual* obedience to the laws of God. By an *actual* obedience, I mean the practice and exerciſe of the ſeveral graces and virtues of Chriſtianity, in the courſe and tenor of a holy life; when *out of a good converſation men do ſhew forth their works*; and by the outward actions of their lives do give real teſtimony of their piety, juſtice, ſobriety, humility, meekneſs, and charity, and all other chriſtian graces and virtues, as occaſion is miniſtred for the practice and exerciſe of them.

By a *virtual* obedience, I mean a ſincere belief of the Goſpel, of the holineſs and equity of its precepts, of the truth of its promiſes, and the terror of its threatnings, and a true repentance for all our ſins. This is obedience in the root and principle; for he who ſincerely believes the Goſpel, and does truly repent of the errors and miſcarriages of his life, is firmly reſolved to obey the commandments of God, and to walk before him in holineſs and righteouſneſs all the days of his life; ſo that there is nothing that prevents or hinders this man's *actual* obedience to the laws of God, in the courſe of a holy and good life, but only the want of time and opportunity for it. And this was the caſe of thoſe, who, upon the hearing of the Goſpel when it was firſt preached to them, did heartily embrace it, and turn from their ſins, and the worſhip of idols, to the true and living God, but perhaps were cut off ſoon after; (as there were many who being but newly gained to Chriſtianity, were preſently put to death, and ſuffer'd martyrdom for that profeſſion;) there is no doubt to be made, but that in this caſe, a *virtual* obedience was in ſuch perſons a ſufficient qualification for eternal life.

But where there is time and opportunity for the exerciſe of our obedience, and the practice of the virtues of a holy life, there *actual* obedience to the laws and precepts of the Goſpel is neceſſary, to qualify us for eternal happineſs; ſo that tho' a man do ſincerely believe the Goſpel, and truly repent of his ſins, and reſolve upon a better life; yet if he do not afterwards in the courſe of his life put this reſolution in practice, and *bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life,* and perſevere in a holy courſe, his firſt reſolution of obedience, tho' it were ſincere, will not avail him to ſalvation. Nay, if he ſhould continue for ſome time in the reſolution and practice of a holy and virtuous life, and afterwards fall off from it, and *turn from the holy commandment deliver'd unto him, his latter end would be worſe than his beginning; all his righteouſneſs that he hath done would not be remember'd; he ſhould die in his iniquity.* For *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* If *any man draw back, God's ſoul will have no pleaſure in him.* This is ſo very clear and plain from Scripture, that no man can entertain a contrary perſuaſion, without contradicting the whole tenor of the Bible.

The ſum of what I have ſaid is this, that a *virtual* obedience and *ſincere* faith and repentance are ſufficient, where there is no time and opportunity for *actual* obedience, and the practice of a holy life: but where there is opportunity for *actual* obedience, and the continued practice of a good life, and perſeverance therein; they are indiſpenſably neceſſary in order to our *eternal ſalvation,* and a well grounded hope and aſſurance of it.

2dly, There is a *perfect,* and there is a *ſincere* obedience. *Perfect* obedience conſiſts in the exact conformity of our hearts and lives to the law of God, without the leaſt impefection, and without failing in any point or degree of our duty. And this obedience, as it is not conſiſtent with the frailty and infirmity of corrupt nature, and the imperfection of our preſent ſtate, ſo neither doth God require it of us as a neceſſary condition of eternal life. We are indeed commanded to be *perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect:* but we are not to underſtand this ſtrictly and rigorouſly; for that is not only impoſſible to men in this preſent ſtate of imperfection, but abſolutely impoſſible to human nature, for *men to be perfect, as God is perfect;* but the plain meaning of this precept is, that we ſhould imitate thoſe divine perfections of goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and purity, and endeavour to be as like God in all theſe as we can, and be ſtill aſpiring after a nearer reſemblance of him, as may be evident to any one who conſiders the connexion and occaſion of theſe words.

By a *ſincere* obedience, I mean ſuch a conformity of our lives and actions to the law of God, as to the general courſe and tenor of them, that we do not live in the habitual practice of any known ſin, or in the cuſtomary neglect of any material or conſiderable part of our known duty; and that we be not wilfully and deliberately guilty of the ſingle act of heinous and notorious ſins, as I have formerly explain'd this matter more at large, in another diſcourſe. And this obedience, even in the beſt of men, is mixt with great frailty and imperfection; but yet becauſe it is the utmoſt that we can do in this ſtate of infirmity and imperfection, the terms of the Goſpel are ſo merciful and gracious, as that God is pleaſed for the ſake of the meritorious obedience and ſufferings of our bleſſed Saviour, to accept this *ſincere,* tho' *imperfect* obedience, and to reward it with eternal life. And this, I doubt not, after all the intricate diſputes, and infinite controverſies about this buſineſs, is the true and clear ſtate of the matter.

And this *ſincere* obedience which the Goſpel requires of us, as a condition of our happineſs, tho' it be ſometimes call'd by divines, *evangelical perfection;* yet it is but very improperly ſo call'd; for nothing is properly perfect, to which any thing is wanting; and great defects and imperfections muſt needs be acknowledged in the obedience of the beſt and holieſt men upon earth; and they who pretend to *perfection* in this life, do neither underſtand the law of God, nor themſelves, but (as St. *John* ſays of ſuch perſons) *they deceive themſelves, and the truth is not in them;* and beſides other imperfections, theſe two are evident in them, *ignorance* and *pride.*

And thus much may ſuffice to have ſpoken to this *ſecond* particular, namely what obedience the Goſpel requires as a condition, and is pleaſed to accept as a qualification, for eternal life.

SERMON

SERMON LXIX.

The Poſſibility and Neceſſity of Goſpel-Obedience, and its Conſiſtence with free Grace.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

HEB. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey him.

FOR the explication of theſe words, I propos'd to conſider theſe *five* things.

1ſt. How and by what means Chriſt is the Author of our ſalvation.

2dly, What obedience the Goſpel requires as a condition, and is pleaſed to accept as a qualification, in thoſe who hope for eternal ſalvation.

3dly, The poſſibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and aſſiſtance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the Goſpel.

4thly, The neceſſity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happineſs.

5thly, The conſiſtency of this method and means of our ſalvation with the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God declared in the Goſpel.

I have handled the *two* firſt of theſe, and now proceed to the

Third thing I propoſed to conſider, *viz.* The poſſibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and aſſiſtance which is offer'd and ready to be afforded to us by the Goſpel. For if Chriſt be *the Author of eternal ſalvation* only *to thoſe who obey him*; then thoſe who live in diſobedience to the Goſpel are in a ſtate of damnation. But there cannot be the guilt of diſobedience, where obedience is impoſſible; no man being guilty, or juſtly liable to puniſhment, for the not doing of that, which it was no ways poſſible for him to do. Therefore the covenant of the Goſpel, into which God is enter'd with mankind, doth neceſſarily ſuppoſe the poſſibility of performing the condition of it; otherwiſe it leaves them in as bad a condition as they were in before, becauſe it only offers new bleſſings and benefits to us, but ſets us never the nearer the obtaining of them, if ſo be the condition upon which they are granted be altogether impoſſible to us; nay, it renders our ſtate many degrees worſe, if our not performing the condition of ſuch gracious offers brings us under new and greater guilt.

If it be ſaid, that ſome few perſons have great benefit by it, becauſe they by an eſpecial and effectual grace ſhall be enabled to perform the conditions of this covenant; is not this a mighty ſtraitening to the grace and mercy of the Goſpel; to confine it within ſo narrow a compaſs, as ſtill to leave the greateſt part of mankind in a worſe condition, than if ſalvation had never been offer'd to them? as it certainly does, if (as this doctrine does neceſſarily ſuppoſe) the guilt and puniſhment of men ſhall be greatly increaſed and heightned by their contempt of, and diſobedience to the Goſpel; when at the ſame time it is acknowledged, that it was not poſſible for thoſe men to obey it, for want of that ſpecial and effectual grace, which is neceſſary to enable them thereto. I do not love to handle theſe points contentiouſly, but this in my apprehenſion does as much derogate from the amplitude and riches of God's grace in the Goſpel, as any thing that can eaſily be ſaid.

And therefore, for the right ſtating and clearing of this matter, I ſhall endeavour to make out theſe *three* things.

1. That we are not ſufficient of our ſelves, and by any power in us, to perform the conditions of the Goſpel.

2. That the grace of God is ready to enable and aſſiſt us to the performance of theſe conditions, if we be not wanting to our ſelves.

3. That what the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our ſelves, that may properly be ſaid to be poſſible to us, and, in ſome ſenſe, in our power.

1. That we are not ſufficient of our ſelves, and by any power in us, to perform the conditions of the Goſpel. The grace of God doth clearly appear in the whole buſineſs

of our ſalvation, *By grace ye are ſaved* (ſays the Apoſtle) *and that not of your ſelves, it is the gift of God.* Faith is the gift of God, and ſo is repentance. *It is God that works in us both to will and to do of his own goodneſs*; that is, who both inclines and excites us to that which is good, and enables us to do it. *Without me* (ſays Chriſt) *ye can do nothing*; and *through Chriſt ſtrengthening me* (ſaith St. *Paul) I am able to do all things*; all things which God requires of us, and expects to be done by us in order to our ſalvation. Without the grace of Chriſt, *we are without ſtrength*; *and are not ſufficient of our ſelves, as of our ſelves, to think a good thought*; that is, we are not ſufficient of our ſelves to deſign or reſolve upon any thing that is good; *but our ſufficiency is of God.*

The depravation of our nature hath brought a great impotency and diſability upon us to that which is good; and we have made our ſelves much weaker by evil practice; by the power of evil habits, we are enſlaved to our luſts, and *ſold under ſin.* So that if at any time we are convinced of our duty, and from that conviction have an inclination to that which is good, *evil is preſent to us.* When the law of God gives us the knowledge of our duty, and ſtares our conſciences in the face, *there is another law in our members, warring againſt the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of ſin, which is in our members.* Sin brings us under the power of *Satan*, and gives him dominion over us. *For his Servants ye are whom ye obey*; ſo that he rules and bears ſway in us, and *we are led captive by him at his pleaſure.* Evil and vitious habits are a kind of ſecond nature ſuperinduced upon us, which takes away our power and liberty to that which is good, and renders it impoſſible to us to raiſe and reſcue our ſelves; ſo that *we are priſoners and captives,* till *the Son of God ſets us free: and dead in treſpaſſes and ſins,* till *he gives us life.* And therefore the Prophet repreſents the recovery of our ſelves from the bondage of ſin, by ſuch things as are naturally impoſſible, to ſhew how great our weakneſs and impotency is; *Jer.* xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the Leopard his ſpots? Then may ye alſo do good, who are accuſtomed to do evil.* And by how much ſtronger the chains of our ſins are, and the more unable we are to break looſe from them: by ſo much the greater and more evident is the neceſſity of the divine aſſiſtance, and of the power of God's grace, to knock off thoſe fetters, and to reſcue us from this bondage and ſlavery.

2. The grace of God is ready to aſſiſt and enable us to the performance of theſe conditions, that is, to faith and repentance, and all the purpoſes of obedience and a holy life; if we be not wanting to our ſelves, and do not reject or neglect to make uſe of that grace, which God offers us, and is ready to afford us in a very plentiful manner. And this is that which renders all the mercies of the Goſpel effectual (if it be not our own fault, and wilful neglect) to the great end and deſign of our ſalvation; and without this, all the gracious offers of the goſpel would ſignify nothing at all to our advantage.

And this likewiſe is that which renders the unbelief and impenitency and diſobedience of men utterly inexcuſable, becauſe nothing of all this does proceed from want of power but of will to do better. And therefore this is ſo neceſſary an encouragement to all the endeavours of obedience and a good life, that men ſhould be aſſured of God's readineſs to aſſiſt and help them in the doing of their duty; that without this the revelation of the Goſpel, though never ſo clear, would ſignify nothing to us, all the precepts and directions for a good life, and the moſt vehement perſuaſions and exhortations to obedience, would have no force and life in them; for what ſignifies it to direct the dead, and ſpeak to them that cannot hear, and to perſuade men, tho' it were with all the earneſtneſs in the world, to thoſe things which it is impoſſible for them to do?

Therefore our bleſſed Saviour, when he had laid down, and explained the precepts of holineſs and virtue in his Sermon upon the mount, to encourage them to what he had been directing and propoſing to them, he aſſures them that God is ready to afford his grace and aſſiſtance to all thoſe that are ſincerely deſirous to do his will, and do earneſtly implore his grace and aſſiſtance to that purpoſe. *Matth.* vii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. *Aſk* (ſaith he) *and it ſhall be given you*; *ſeek, and ye ſhall find*; *knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you: For every one that aſketh, receiveth*; *and he that ſeeketh, findeth*; *and to him that knocketh, it ſhall be opened.* So that if any man want the grace and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit, it is his own fault; it is either for want of ſeeking or for want of earneſtneſs in aſking; for our Saviour expreſly aſſures us, that he denies it to none; *for every one that aſketh, receiveth.*

And to give us a more lively and ſenſible aſſurance of this, he repreſents the care and kindneſs of God to men, by the affections of earthly parents to their children, who tho' they be many times evil themſelves, yet are not wont to deny their children neceſſary good things, when they decently and dutifully beg them at their hands; *what man is there of you, whom if his ſon aſk bread, will he give him a ſtone? Or if he aſk a fiſh, will give him a ſerpent? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more ſhall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that aſk him?* Here is a general promiſe and declaration, that upon our humble and earneſt prayer to God, he will grant us whatever is good and neceſſary; by which is certainly intended in the firſt place, ſpiritual good things, becauſe theſe are the beſt and moſt neceſſary; and to ſatisfy us that our Saviour did in the firſt place, and more eſpecially mean theſe, St. *Luke* does particularly inſtance in the grace and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit, *Luke* xi. 13. *How much more ſhall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that aſk him? The holy Spirit*, that is, the continual preſence and influence of it to all the purpoſes of guidance and direction, of grace and aſſiſtance, of comfort and ſupport in our chriſtian courſe.

And what elſe is the meaning of that parable of our Saviour's concerning the *Talents* entruſted with every man, according to his capacity and opportunities, *Matth.* xxv. I ſay, what elſe can be the meaning of it but this; That God is before-hand with every man, by affording the advantages and opportunities of being happy, and ſuch a meaſure of grace and aſſiſtance to that end, which if he faithfully improve, he ſhall be admitted *into the joy of his Lord*.

And upon this conſideration of the gracious promiſes of the Goſpel to this purpoſe, it is, that the Apoſtle St. *Paul* doth ſo earneſtly exhort Chriſtians to endeavour after the higheſt degree of univerſal holineſs and purity, that we are capable of in this life; 2 *Cor.* vii. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved, let us cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God.* And ſo likewiſe *Phil.* ii. 12, 13. *Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling* (that is, with great care and concernment, leſt you ſhould fall ſhort of it) *for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleaſure.* The conſideration of God's readineſs to aſſiſt us, and of his grace which is always at hand to ſtir up our wills to that which is good, and to ſtrengthen us in the doing of it, ought to be a great argument and encouragement to us, to put forth our utmoſt endeavours, and ſo co-operate with the grace of God toward our own ſalvation.

And the Apoſtle St. *Peter* uſeth the ſame argument to preſs men to uſe their utmoſt *diligence, to make their calling and election ſure*, by abounding in all the virtues of a good life, 2 *Pet.* i. 3, 4. *According as his divine power hath given us all things which pertain to life and godlineſs*, (that is, hath ſo plentifully furniſh'd us with all the requiſites to a godly life) *through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue* (that is, by knowledge of the Goſpel and the grace therein offered to us) *whereby he hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by theſe ye might be partakers of a divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt.* And then from the conſideration of this divine power, conveyed to us by the Goſpel, and the promiſes of it, he exhorts men *to give all diligence, to add to their faith, virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godlineſs, and brotherly love and charity.*

And indeed the Scripture every where aſcribes our regeneration and ſanctification, the beginning, and progreſs, and perſeverance of our obedience, to the powerful grace and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit; we are ſaid to be *regenerated and born again of the Spirit, to be renewed and ſanctified by the holy Ghoſt, to be led by the Spirit,* and *by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the fleſh*, and in a word, *to be kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto ſalvation.*

3. What the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our ſelves, may properly be ſaid to be poſſible to us, and in ſome ſenſe, in our power. That may be ſaid to be poſſible to us, which tho' we *cannot do of our ſelves, as of our ſelves*, (that is, by our own natural power) yet we can do by the help and aſſiſtance of another, if that aſſiſtance be ready to be afforded to us; as we are ſure the grace of God's holy Spirit is, becauſe he hath promiſed it to them that ſeek it, and *he is faithful who hath promiſed.*

That cannot be ſaid to be wholly out of any man's power, which he may have for aſking; that which we are able to do by the ſtrength and aſſiſtance of another, is not impoſſible to us. Surely St. *Paul* did no ways derogate from the grace of God when he ſaid, *I am able to do all things thro' Chriſt ſtrengthning me*; he reckons himſelf able to do all that which by the ſtrength of Chriſt he was enabled to do.

And this is the true ground of all the perſuaſions and exhortations, which we meet with in Scripture, to holineſs and obedience; which would all be, not only to no purpoſe, but very unreaſonable, if we were wholly deſtitute of power to do what God commands: But if he be always ready at hand to aſſiſt us by a grace ſufficient for us, if he co-operate with us in the work of our ſalvation, then is there abundant ground of encouragement to our endeavours; and if we fall ſhort of eternal ſalvation, it is wholly our own fault; it is not becauſe God is wanting to us in thoſe aids and aſſiſtances of his grace which are neceſſary; but becauſe we are wanting to our ſelves, in not ſeeking God's grace more earneſtly, or by neglecting to make uſe of it when it is afforded to us. For it is really all one, both to the encouragement of our endeavours, and to the rendering of our diſobedience inexcuſable, whether we be able of our ſelves to perform the condition of the Goſpel, or God be ready to aſſiſt us by his grace and holy Spirit to that purpoſe.

Wherefore, as the Apoſtle exhorts, *Heb.* xii. 12, 13, 14, 15. *Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make ſtrait paths for your feet, leſt that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord; looking diligently leſt any man fail of the grace of God*; intimating, that it is want of care and diligence on our part, if the grace of God fail of its end, and be not effectual to all the purpoſes of faith and repentance, and obedience. God does not with-hold his grace from us; but men may receive it in vain, if they do not make uſe of it. And thus I have done with the *third* thing I propoſed to conſider from theſe words. I proceed to the

Fourth, viz. To conſider the neceſſity of this obedience, in order to our obtaining of eternal life and happineſs. *Chriſt is the author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him*; that is, to ſuch, and only to ſuch, as live in obedience to the precepts of his holy Goſpel, to them who frame the general courſe of their lives according to his laws. Some men ſeem to be ſo afraid of the merit of obedience and good works, that they are loth to aſſert the neceſſity of them, and do it with ſo much caution, as if they were not throughly perſuaded of it, or did apprehend ſome dangerous conſequences of it: but this fear is perfectly groundleſs; as if merit could not be excluded, without caſting off our duty, and releaſing our ſelves from any neceſſary obligation to be good. For any man ſurely may eaſily diſcern a plain difference between a worthineſs of deſert, and a fitneſs of receiving a rebel, being penitent and ſorry for what he hath done; though he cannot deſerve a pardon, yet he may thereby be qualified and made meet to receive it; though repentance do not make him worthy, yet it may make him capable of it, which an obſtinate rebel, and one that perſiſts in his diſloyalty, is not. This is a thing ſo plain of it ſelf, that it would be waſte of time and words to inſiſt longer upon the proof of it.

Now the neceſſity of obedience, in order to eternal life and happineſs, relies upon theſe *three* grounds:

1ſt, Upon the conſtitution and appointment of God.

2dly, The general reaſon of rewards.

3dly, Upon the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience.

1ſt, The conſtitution and appointment of God. *Eternal life is the gift of God*; and he may do what he will with his own, he may diſpenſe his gifts and favours upon what terms and conditions he pleaſeth; and therefore if he hath plainly declared, that *to them who by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will give eternal life*; that *without holineſs, no man ſhall ſee the Lord*; but *if we have our fruit unto holineſs, our end ſhall be everlaſting life*; who ſhall reſiſt his will, or diſpute his pleaſure? The right and authority of God in this matter is ſo unqueſtionable, that it admits of no conteſt; and the bleſſings and benefits propos'd, are ſo infinitely great and invaluable, that no condition of obtaining them which is poſſible to be perform'd by us, can be thought hard and unequal; ſo that we ought thankfully to receive ſo great a favour, let the terms and conditions of it be what they will; and if there were no other reaſon for the impoſing of theſe conditions upon us, of faith, and repentance, and obedience, but meerly the will and pleaſure of God, this were enough to ſilence all objections againſt it.

But *2dly*, The neceſſity of obedience in order to eternal life, is likewiſe founded in the reaſon of rewards in general. For though the meaſure and degree of our reward ſo infinitely beyond the proportion of our beſt duty and ſervice, as eternal life and happineſs is, I ſay, though the meaſure and degree of this reward be founded in the immenſe bounty and goodneſs of God, yet the reaſon of reward in general, is neceſſarily founded in our obedience to God's laws; for according to the true nature and reaſon of things, nothing but obedience is capable of reward. For though authority may pardon the breach and tranſgreſſion of laws, and remit the puniſhment due thereto, yet to reward the contempt of laws, and wilful diſobedience to them, is directly contrary to the deſign of government, and does plainly overthrow the very reaſon and end of all laws, and makes obedience and diſobedience to be all one; if ſo be they are equally capable of reward: and therefore nothing can be more abſurd and ſenſeleſs, than for any man to hope to be rewarded by God, who does not live in a ſincere obedience to his laws. *Every man that hath this hope in him,* (that is, in Chriſt Jeſus, to be ſaved by him) *purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure*; that is, endeavours to be like him in the purity and obedience of his life: and nothing ſurely can be more unreaſonable than to expect to be rewarded by the great governor and judge of the world, if we be diſobedient to his laws; for where obedience to law is refuſed, there all reaſon and equity and reward ceaſeth. No wiſe prince can think fit to reward diſloyalty and contempt of his laws; becauſe to reward it, would be to encourage it; much leſs will God, the great and infinitely wiſe governor of the world.

3dly, The neceſſity of obedience will yet more evidently appear, if we conſider the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience. The happineſs of heaven, which is the reward promiſed in the Goſpel is deſcribed to us by the ſight and enjoyment of God. Now to render us capable of this bleſſed reward, it is neceſſary that we be like God; but nothing but obedience and holineſs, and *being renewed after the image of him who created us in righteouſneſs* can make us like to God. For he that would be like God muſt be holy, and juſt, and good, and patient, and merciful, as God is; and this alone can make us capable of the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God; for unleſs *we be like him,* we cannot *ſee him as he is,* and if we ſhould be admitted into heaven, we could not find any pleaſure and happineſs in communion with him. *Bleſſed are the pure in heart* (ſays our Saviour) *for they ſhall ſee God. Without holineſs* (ſays the Apoſtle) *no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* And indeed, it is in the very nature of the thing impoſſible, that a wicked man (whilſt he remains ſo) ſhould ever be happy, becauſe there can be no agreeable and delightful ſociety between thoſe that are of a quite contrary temper and diſpoſition to one another, between him *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, and a ſinful and impure creature. For *what fellowſhip* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *can righteouſneſs have with unrighteouſneſs? what communion hath light with darkneſs, or God with Belial?* that is, with the wicked and diſobedient. Till we become like to God in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy ſociety between him and us; we could neither delight our ſelves in God, nor he take any pleaſure in us; for *he is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him. The wicked ſhall not ſtand in his ſight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* It cannot be otherwiſe, but that there muſt be an eternal jarring and diſcord between the righteous and holy God, and wicked and unrighteous men. *I will behold thy face* (ſays *David*) *in righteouſneſs.* There is no looking God in the face, upon any other terms. If we have been *workers of iniquity,* God will caſt us out of his ſight, and in great anger bid us to *depart from him*; and we alſo ſhall deſire him to *depart from* us, being unable to bear the ſight of him.

So that there is great reaſon why holineſs and obedience ſhould be made the conditions of eternal life and happineſs, ſince in the very nature of the thing it is ſo neceſſary a qualification for the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of God, who to *us*, is the cauſe and fountain of happineſs. I come in the

Fifth and laſt place, To ſhew that this method and means of our ſalvation is no prejudice to the law of faith, and to the free grace and mercy of God declared in the Goſpel. The Goſpel is called *the law of faith,* and *the law of grace,* in oppoſition to the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation, which is called *the law,* or *covenant of works,* becauſe it conſiſteth ſo much in external rites and obſervances, which were but *types and ſhadows of good things to come,* (as the Apoſtle calls them in this epiſtle,) and which when they were come, that law did expire of it ſelf, and was out of date, the obligation and obſervance of it was no longer neceſſary; but *a better covenant,* which was *eſtabliſhed upon better promiſes,* came in the place of it, and men were *juſtified by faith,* that is, by ſincerely embracing the chriſtian religion, and were no longer under an obligation to that external, and ſervile, and imperfect diſpenſation, which conſiſted in circumciſion, and in almoſt an endleſs number of external ceremonies. Theſe are *the works of the law* ſo often ſpoken of by St. *Paul,* concerning which the *Jews* had not only an opinion of the neceſſity of them to a man's juſtification and ſalvation, but likewiſe of the merit of them; in oppoſition to both which opinions, St. *Paul* calls the covenant of the Goſpel, *the law of faith,* and *the law of grace.*

But there is no where the leaſt intimation given, either by our Saviour or his Apoſtles, that obedience to the precepts of the Goſpel (which are in ſubſtance the moral law cleared and perfected) is not neceſſary to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life; but on the contrary, 'tis our Saviour's expreſs direction to the young man, who aſk'd, *what good things he ſhould do, that he might obtain eternal life? If thou wilt* (ſays he) *enter into life, keep the commandments:* and that he might underſtand what commandments he meant, he inſtanceth in the precepts of the moral law. And indeed, the whole tenor of our Saviour's ſermons, and the precepts and writings of the Apoſtles, are full and expreſs to this purpoſe. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven, Whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine* (that is, theſe precepts which I have delivered) *and doth them not, I will liken him to a fooliſh man, who built his houſe upon the ſand; and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. If ye know theſe things, happy are ye, if ye do them. In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him. In Jeſus Chriſt neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but faith, that is acted and inſpired by charity.* And that the Apoſtle here means, *that charity* or *love,* which is *the fulfilling of the law,* is evident from what he ſays elſewhere, *that neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* In which text it is plain, that the Apoſtle ſpeaks of the terms of our juſtification, and what is available with God to that purpoſe. And St. *James* to the ſame purpoſe, tells us, that *by the works of obedience our faith is made perfect;* and that *faith without works is dead:* and ſurely a dead faith will neither juſtify nor ſave any man. St. *John* likewiſe very earneſtly cautions us to take heed of any ſuch doctrine, as would take away the neceſſity of righteouſneſs and obedience; *Little children,* (ſays he) *let no man deceive you; he that doth righteouſneſs, is righteous, as he is righteous.* To all which I ſhall only add the plain words of my text, that *Chriſt became the Author of eternal ſalvation to them that obey him.*

So that no man hath reaſon to fear, that this doctrine of the neceſſity of obedience to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life, ſhould be any ways prejudicial to the law of faith, and the law of grace. For ſo long as theſe *three* things are but aſſerted and ſecured:

1*ſt*, That faith is the root and principle of obedience and a holy life, and that *without it, it is impoſſible to pleaſe God.*

2*dly*, That we ſtand continually in need of the divine grace and aſſiſtance to enable us to perform that obedience which the goſpel requires of us, and is pleaſed to accept in order to eternal life. And,

3*dly*, That the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of God, conferring theſe bleſſings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and ſatisfaction of the obedience and ſufferings of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer; I ſay, ſo long as we aſſert theſe *three* things, we give all that the Goſpel any where aſcribes to faith, and to the grace of God revealed in the Goſpel.

I have been careful to expreſs theſe things more fully and diſtinctly, that no man may imagine, that whilſt we aſſert the neceſſity of obedience and a holy life, we have any deſign to derogate in the leaſt from the faith and the grace of God; but only to engage and encourage men to holineſs and a good life, by convincing them of the abſolute and indiſpenſable neceſſity of it, in order to eternal ſalvation. For all that I have ſaid, is in plain *Engliſh* no more but this, that it is neceſſary for a man to be a good man, that he may get to heaven; and whoever finds faults with this doctrine, finds fault with the Goſpel it ſelf, and the main end and deſign of the grace of God therein revealed to mankind, which offers ſalvation to men upon no other terms than theſe which I have mention'd; and to preach and preſs this doctrine, is certainly, if any thing in the world can be ſo, to purſue the great end and deſign of the chriſtian religion, ſo plainly and expreſly declared by St. *Paul, Tit.* ii. 11, 12. *The grace of God that bringeth ſalvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* And if the grace of God declared in the Goſpel have this effect upon us, then we may with confidence *wait for the bleſſed hope, and the* *glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works*; and then he adds, *theſe things teach, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*; that is, declare and inculcate this doctrine, and rebuke ſeverely thoſe who teach or practiſe contrary to it. And he repeats it again with a more vehement charge to *Titus*, to preſs upon men the neceſſity of obedience and good works, *Chap.* iii. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works.*

All that now remains, is to make ſome uſeful inferences from what hath been ſaid upon this argument, and ſo to conclude this diſcourſe.

Firſt of all, To convince us that an empty profeſſion of the chriſtian religion, how ſpecious and glorious ſoever it be, if it be deſtitute of the fruits of obedience and a holy life, will by no means avail to bring us to heaven. No profeſſion of faith in Chriſt, no ſubjection to him, tho' we be baptized in his name, and liſt our ſelves in the number of his diſciples and followers, tho' we have made a conſtant profeſſion of all the articles of the chriſtian faith, and have performed all the external parts and duties of religion, have gone conſtantly to church, and frequented the ſervice of God, and have joined in publick prayers to God with great appearance of devotion, and have heard his word with great reverence and attention, and received the bleſſed ſacrament with all imaginable expreſſions of love and gratitude to our bleſſed Redeemer; nay, tho' we had *heard* our bleſſed Saviour himſelf *teach in our ſtreets*, and *had eaten and drunken in his preſence*; yet if all this while *we have not done the will of God*, and obey'd his laws, none of all theſe things will ſignify any thing to bring us to heaven, and make us partakers of that ſalvation, which he hath purchaſed for mankind.

But we cannot plead ſo much for our ſelves, as thoſe did, of whom our Saviour ſpeaks. None of us ſhall be able to alledge for our ſelves at the great day, that *we had propheſied in his name, and in his name had caſt out devils, and in his name had done many wonderful works*; and yet if we could alledge all this, it would do us no good. All that ſuch can ſay for themſelves is, that *they have called him Lord, Lord:* that is, they have made profeſſion of his religion, and been call'd by his name; that they have paid an outward honour and reſpect to him, and declared a mighty love and affection for him; but *they have not done his will*, but *have hated to be reformed, and have caſt his commandments behind their backs*; they have only born the leaves of an outward profeſſion, but *have brought forth no fruit unto holineſs*, and therefore can have no reaſonable expectation, that *their end ſhould be everlaſting life.* So that when theſe men ſhall appear before the great and terrible judge of the world, they ſhall have nothing to ſay but thoſe vain words, *Lord, Lord:* To which our Saviour will anſwer in that day, *why call ye me, Lord, Lord, when ye would not do the things which I ſaid?* Notwithſtanding all your profeſſion of faith in me, and ſubjection to me, *ye have been workers of iniquity, therefore depart from me, I know ye not whence ye are.*

Secondly, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid ſhould ſtir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of what the author of our ſalvation hath done for us; and there is great reaſon for thankfulneſs, whether we conſider the greatneſs of the benefit conferred upon us, or the way and manner in which it was purchaſed, or the eaſy and reaſonable terms upon which it may be obtain'd.

1ſt, If we conſider the greatneſs of the benefit conferred upon us, and that is ſalvation, *eternal ſalvation*, which comprehends in it all the bleſſings and benefits of the Goſpel, both the means and the end, our happineſs, and the way to it, by *ſaving us from our ſins*; from the guilt of them, by our juſtification in the blood of Chriſt, and from the power and dominion of them, by the ſanctifying grace and virtue of the holy Ghoſt.

And it comprehends the end, our deliverance from hell and the wrath to come, and the beſtowing of happineſs upon us, a great and laſting happineſs, great as our wiſhes, and immortal as our ſouls; all this is comprehended in *eternal ſalvation.*

2dly, If we conſider the way and manner in which this great benefit was purchaſed and procured for us; in a way of infinite kindneſs and condeſcenſion, in the loweſt humiliation, and the unparallel'd ſufferings of the Son of God; for *never was there any ſorrow like unto his ſorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger*; in his *taking upon him the form of a ſervant*, and the perſon of a ſinner, and his *becoming obedient to death, even the death of the croſs*, which was the puniſhment of the vileſt ſlaves, and the moſt heinous malefactors. The Son of God came down from heaven, from the higheſt pitch of glory and happineſs, into this lower world, this *vale of tears*, and ſink of ſin and ſorrow; and was contented himſelf to ſuffer, to ſave us from eternal ruin; to be the moſt deſpicable, and the moſt miſerable man that ever was, that he might raiſe us to glory and honour, and advance us to a ſtate of the greateſt happineſs that human nature is capable of.

3dly, If we conſider the eaſy and reaſonable terms upon which we may be made partakers of this unſpeakable benefit, and that is by a conſtant and ſincere and univerſal obedience to the laws of God, which ſuppoſeth repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as the root and principle of all the virtues of a good life; that is, by doing that which beſt becomes us, and which is moſt agreeable to the original frame of our nature, and to the dictates of our reaſon, and which, ſetting aſide the conſideration of our reward, is really beſt for our preſent benefit and advantage, our comfort and happineſs, even in this world; for God, in giving laws to us, hath impoſed nothing upon us, but what in all reaſon ought to have been our choice, if he had not impoſed it; nothing but what is for our good, and is in its own nature neceſſary to make us capable of that happineſs which he hath promiſed to us. And what can be more gracious, than to make one benefit the condition of a greater? Than to promiſe to make us happy for ever, if we will but do that which upon all accounts is really beſt and moſt for our advantage in this preſent life?

Thirdly, Here is abundant encouragement given to our obedience; we have the divine aſſiſtance promiſed to us, to enable us to the performance of the moſt difficult parts of our duty; we have the holy Spirit of God to help our infirmities, to excite us to that which is good, and to help and ſtrengthen us in the doing of it.

For our further encouragement we are aſſured of the divine acceptance in caſe of our ſincere obedience, notwithſtanding the manifold failings and imperfections of it, for the ſake of the perfect righteouſneſs and obedience, and the meritorious ſufferings of our bleſſed Saviour: And tho' *when we have done all we can do, we are unprofitable ſervants*, and have done nothing but what was our duty, yet God is pleaſed to accept what we can do, becauſe it is ſincere, and to forgive the defects and imperfections of our obedience, for his ſake, who *fulfilled all righteouſneſs*.

And beſides all this, we have the encouragement of a great and everlaſting reward, infinitely beyond all proportion of any ſervice and obedience that we can perform. And if God be ready to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen us in the doing of our duty, and be willing ſo graciouſly to accept and to reward at ſuch a rate the ſincerity of our endeavours to pleaſe him, notwithſtanding all the failings and imperfections of our beſt ſervice and obedience, what can we poſſibly deſire more for our encouragement to *patient continuance in well-doing*, and to be *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the Lord*?

Fourthly, and *laſtly*, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid upon this argument may ſerve ſeverely to rebuke the groundleſs preſumption of thoſe who rely with ſo much confidence upon Chriſt for eternal ſalvation, without any conſcience or care to keep his commandments; as if ſalvation lay upon his hands, and he knew not how to diſpoſe of it, and were glad of any one that would come and take it off upon any terms. No, *he came to ſave us from our ſins, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

So that the ſalvation which he hath purchaſed for us, doth neceſſarily imply our forſaking of our ſins, and returning to God and our duty, and his death and ſufferings are not more an argument of his great love to mankind, than they are a demonſtration of his perfect hatred of ſin. So that if we continue in the love and practice of ſin, we defeat the whole deſign of his coming into the world, and of all that he hath done and ſuffered for us; and the redemption which Chriſt hath wrought for us will not avail us in the leaſt. *Salvation is far from the wicked*, (ſays *David*, Pſal. cxix. 155.) If we have been *workers of iniquity*, the Saviour of the world when he comes to judge it, will bid us *to depart from him*.

From all that hath been ſaid, it is evident, that it is the greateſt preſumption in the world for any man to hope to obtain eternal ſalvation by any device whatſoever, or in the communion of any church whatſoever, without obedience and a holy life. For tho' our obedience cannot merit; yet it is neceſſary to qualify and diſpoſe us for it: Though it does not make us ſtrictly worthy; yet it makes us *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light*.

SER-

SERMON LXX.

The Authority of Jeſus Chriſt, with the Commiſſion and Promiſe which he gave to his Apoſtles.

MATTH. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

And Jeſus came and ſpake unto them, ſaying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: Teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you: And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

THESE words are the laſt that our bleſſed Saviour ſpake to his Apoſtles, immediately before his aſcenſion into heaven; and there are theſe *three* things contained in them:

I. A declaration of his own authority; *All power is given unto me both in heaven and in earth.*

II. A commiſſion to his diſciples, grounded upon that authority; *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: Teaching them to obſerve all things whatſover I have commanded you.*

III. A promiſe to encourage them in this work; *And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*

I. Here's our Saviour's declaration of his own authority; *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.* Here is an unlimited power and authority given him over all creatures in heaven and earth. This the Scripture tells us, was conferred upon him, as a reward of his ſufferings; *Phil.* ii. 8, 9, 10. *He humbled himſelf, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the croſs. Wherefore God alſo hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*; that is, that all creatures, angels, and men, and devils, ſhould do homage, and acknowledge ſubjection to him.

II. Here is the commiſſion he gave to his Apoſtles, by virtue of this authority; *Go ye therefore and teach all nations.* The commiſſion which he here gives, is founded in the authority he had before received. Having all power committed to him, he conſtitutes and appoints the Apoſtles and their ſucceſſors to manage the affairs of this his ſpiritual kingdom upon earth; and this ſeems to be the ſame commiſſion, which St. *John* mentions in other words, *John* xx. 21. *As my Father hath ſent me, even ſo ſend I you*; that is, as my Father commiſſioned me before, ſo now having received full authority from him, I commiſſion you.

Now in this commiſſion, which our Saviour gave to his diſciples, I ſhall take notice,

Firſt, Of the general import and deſign of it.

Secondly, A more particular declaration how they were to manage this deſign.

Firſt, The general import and deſign of this commiſſion; *Go ye and teach all nations.* The word which we tranſlate *teach*, is μαθητεύσατε, diſciple all nations, endeavour to make all the world Chriſtians. One would think here was a power plainly enough given them, to preach the Goſpel to the *Gentiles*, as well as the *Jews*. Which will more fully appear, if we compare this paſſage in St. *Matthew* with the other Evangeliſts. St. *Mark, ch.* xvi. 15. hath it; *Go ye into all the world, and preach the Goſpel to every creature.* From which text I ſuppoſe St. *Francis* thought himſelf bound to preach to beaſts and birds, and accordingly did it very often, and with wonderful ſucceſs, as they tell us in the legend of his life. But to extend our Saviour's commiſſion ſo far, is want of common ſenſe; in which St. *Francis* (tho' they tell us he had other gifts and graces to an eminent degree) was plainly defective.

But to proceed, St. *Luke, ch.* xxiv. 47. tells us, our Saviour commanded, that *repentance and remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at*

Jeruſalem. So that their commiſſion did plainly extend to the *Gentiles,* as well as to the *Jews;* only they were to begin with the *Jews,* and to preach the Goſpel firſt to them, and when they had gone over *Judea* and *Samaria,* then to paſs to other nations, as St. *Luke* doth moſt expreſſly declare, *Acts* i. 8. *Ye ſhall receive power, after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, unto the uttermoſt parts of the earth.*

But ſee the ſtrange power of prejudice, to blind the eyes even of good men, in the plaineſt matters. The diſciples of our Saviour, for all they had entertained a new religion, yet they retained the old pride and prejudice of their nation againſt the reſt of the world; as if none but themſelves had any ſhare in the favour of God, or were to have any part in the ſalvation of the Meſſias.

Our Saviour did ſo far conſider this prejudice of theirs, that he never in his lifetime acquainted them with this matter, ſo as to make them fully to underſtand it, becauſe they were not able to bear it. And it is very probable, that this is one of thoſe things which our Saviour meant, *John* xvi. 12, 13. *I have yet many things to ſay unto you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.* That is, he ſhould lead them into the knowledge of thoſe truths, of which they were not then capable. And tho' our Saviour, after his reſurrection, ſeems to have declar'd this ſufficiently to them; yet by their practice after his aſcenſion, it appears that they underſtood all this only of the *Jews,* namely that they were to preach the Goſpel firſt to the *Jews* that were at *Jeruſalem,* and in *Judea,* and then to thoſe that were diſpers'd in other nations; for 'tis clear from the hiſtory of their firſt preaching recorded in the *Acts,* that they preach'd to none but to the *Jews,* and the proſelytes of the *Jewiſh* religion. So ſtrong was their prejudice, that they had not the leaſt ſuſpicion that this bleſſing of the Goſpel was intended for the heathen world; nor were they convinced to the contrary till St. *Peter* had a ſpecial viſion and revelation to this purpoſe, and the Holy Ghoſt came upon the *Gentiles* in miraculous gifts, as he had done before upon the *Jews* that were converted to Chriſtianity. And thus the Spirit of God *led them into* this *Truth,* and then they underſtood this command of our Saviour's in a larger ſenſe. And to this St. *Peter* plainly refers, *Acts* x. 42. where he tells us, how that Chriſt after his reſurrection appeared to them, and *commanded them to preach unto the people.* So likewiſe do *Paul* and *Barnabas, Acts* xiii. 46. where they ſpeak thus to the *Jews, it was neceſſary that the word ſhould firſt be preached to you; but ſeeing you put it from you, lo, we turn to the Gentiles, for ſo hath the Lord commanded us.* Now he no where commanded this, but in this commiſſion, which he gave them before his aſcenſion.

Secondly, You have here a particular declaration how they were to manage this work of making diſciples to the chriſtian religion.

1. By baptizing them into the chriſtian faith.
2. By inſtructing them in the precepts and practices of a chriſtian life.

1. By baptizing them into the chriſtian faith, which is here call'd *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt.* Baptiſm is a ſolemn rite appointed by our Saviour for the initiating perſons into the chriſtian religion: But it was a ceremony in uſe before, both among the *Jews* and *Gentiles.* The heathens obſerved it at the initiating perſons into their religious myſteries; and the *Jews,* when they admitted proſelytes to their religion; at which time the males (as *Maimonides* tells us) were both circumciſed and baptized, the women were only baptized. One circumſtance of the baptiſm of grown perſons was, that ſtanding in the water up to the neck, they recited ſeveral precepts of the law. And as the *Jewiſh* writers further tell us, this ceremony did not only belong to them that were of grown years, but to the children of proſelytes, if it were deſired, upon condition, that when they came to years they ſhould continue in that religion.

Now though this was a religious ceremony uſed both by *Jews* and *Gentiles,* and without any divine inſtitution, that we know of, our bleſſed Saviour (who in none of his inſtitutions ſeems to have favoured unneceſſary innovations) was ſo far from the ſuperſtition of declining it upon this account, though it had been in religious uſe both among *Jews* and *Gentiles,* that he ſeems the rather to have choſen it for that very reaſon. For ſeeing it was a common rite of all religions, and in itſelf very ſignificant of that purity which is the great deſign of all religions, it was the more likely to find the eaſier acceptance, and to be moſt ſuitable to *that,* which he intended to be the *univerſal religion* of the world.

As for the form of baptiſm, *in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt*, it plainly refers to that ſhort creed, or profeſſion of faith, which was required of thoſe that were to be baptized, anſwerably to the reciting of the precepts of the law, at the baptizing of proſelytes among the *Jews:* Now the articles of this creed were reduced to theſe three heads, *of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt*, and contains what was neceſſary to be believed concerning each of theſe. And this probably is that which the Apoſtle calls the doctrine of baptiſm, *Heb.* vi. 2. *viz.* a ſhort ſummary of the chriſtian faith, the profeſſion whereof was to be made at baptiſm; of which the moſt ancient fathers make ſo frequent mention, calling it *the rule of faith*. It was a great while indeed before Chriſtian tied themſelves ſtrictly to that very form of words, which we now call the Apoſtles Creed; but the ſenſe was the ſame, tho' every one expreſt it in his own words; nay, the ſame father reciting it upon ſeveral occaſions, does not confine himſelf to the very ſame expreſſions: A plain indication that they were not then ſtrictly bound up to any form of words, but retaining the ſenſe and ſubſtance of the articles, every one expreſs'd them as he pleas'd. So that *to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt*, is to perform this rite or ſacrament by the authority of, and with ſpecial relation to the three perſons of the bleſſed Trinity, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt*, as the chief objects of the chriſtian faith, whereof ſolemn profeſſion was then made. So that upon this form of baptiſm appointed by our Saviour, compared with what is elſewhere ſaid in Scripture, concerning the divinity of the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt, is principally founded the doctrine of the bleſſed Trinity, I mean in that ſimplicity in which the Scripture hath delivered it, and not as it hath been ſince confounded and entangled in the cobwebs and niceties of the ſchools. The ſcripture indeed no where calls them perſons, but ſpeaks of them as we do of ſeveral perſons; and therefore that word is not unfitly uſed to expreſs the difference between them, or at leaſt we do not know a fitter word for that purpoſe.

By *baptizing* then *in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt*, is meant, the initiating of men by this ſolemn rite and ceremony into the chriſtian religion, upon their profeſſion of the neceſſary doctrines of it, concerning *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt*, and a ſolemn ſtipulation and engagement to live according to thoſe doctrines: Which promiſe of a ſuitable life and practice was likewiſe made at the ſame time, as *Juſtin Martyr* and others of the ancient Fathers do teſtify.

But before I leave this head, it is very fit to take particular notice what uſe the *Anabaptiſts* make of this text, ſo as in effect to lay the whole ſtreſs of their cauſe upon it, as if by virtue of this command of our Saviour's, and the manner wherein it is expreſs'd, all infants, even thoſe of chriſtian parents, who are themſelves already admitted into the new covenant of the Goſpel, were excluded from baptiſm; becauſe it is here ſaid by our Saviour, *Go ye and diſciple all nations, baptizing them*; from whence they infer, (and very clearly and ſtrongly as they think) that none are to be baptized, but ſuch as are firſt throughly inſtructed in the chriſtian religion, and made diſciples, which Infants are not, but only thoſe who are grown to ſome maturity of years and underſtanding: But the opinion and practice of the ancient church in this mater, is a ſufficient bar to this inference, at leaſt to the clearneſs of it. And indeed it cannot reaſonably be imagined, that the Apoſtles, who had all of them been bred up in the *Jewiſh* religion, which conſtantly, and by virtue of a divine precept and inſtitution, admitted infants into that church, and to the benefits of that covenant, by the rite of circumciſion, and likewiſe the infants of proſelytes by baptiſm, (as I obſerved before) I ſay no man can reaſonably imagine, that the Apoſtles could underſtand our Saviour, as intending by any conſequence from this text, to exclude the children of Chriſtians out of the chriſtian church, and to debar them of the benefits of the new covenant of the Goſpel: The children of Chriſtians being every whit as capable of being taken into this new covenant and of partaking of the benefits of it, as children of the *Jews* were of being admitted into the old. Unleſs we will ſuppoſe (which at firſt ſight ſeems very harſh and unreaſonable) that by the terms of the chriſtian religion, children are in a much worſe condition, than the children of the *Jews* were under the law. So that the parity of reaſon being ſo plain, nothing leſs than an expreſs prohibition from our Saviour, and an exception of children from baptiſm, can be thought ſufficient to deprive the children of Chriſtians of any privilege, of which the *Jewiſh* were capable. For the plain meaning of this commiſſion to the Apoſtles is, to go and *proſelyte all nations to the chriſtian religion*; and to admit them ſolemnly into it by baptiſm; as the *Jews* were wont to proſelyte men to their religion by circumciſion and baptiſm; by which rites alſo they took in the children of the proſelytes, upon promiſe that when they came to years they ſhould continue in that religion. And if this was our Saviour's meaning, the Apoſtles had no reaſon from the tenor of their commiſſion, to underſtand that the children of chriſtian proſelytes were any more excluded, than the children of proſelytes to the *Jewiſh* religion, unleſs our Saviour had expreſly excepted them; for it is a favourable caſe, and in a matter of privilege, and therefore ought not to be determined to debar children of it, upon any obſcure conſequence from a text, which it is certain was never ſo underſtood by the chriſtian church for 1500 years together. I have done with the *firſt* part of their commiſſion, which was to diſciple or proſelyte all nations to the chriſtian religion, and to admit them into the chriſtian church, by the rite or ſacrament of baptiſm. I proceed to conſider the

Second part of their commiſſion, which was to inſtruct men in the precepts and duties of a chriſtian life, *teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you*, You ſee how their commiſſion bounds and limits them; they were to teach others thoſe precepts which Chriſt had taught and deliver'd to them; they had no power by virtue of this commiſſion to make new laws, which would be of univerſal and perpetual obligation, and conſequently neceſſary to the ſalvation of all Chriſtians; they were only to be the publiſhers, but not the authors of this new religion. And therefore St. *Paul*, when the *Corinthians* conſulted him about ſeveral things relating to marriage and virginity, he only gives his advice, but would not take upon him to make a law in thoſe caſes that ſhould be binding to all Chriſtians. And for the ſame reaſon Chriſtians do generally at this day think themſelves abſolved from the obligation of that cannon, which was made even in a council of the Apoſtles, as to all thoſe branches of it, the reaſon whereof is now ceaſed. But notwithſtanding this, the authority which our Saviour conferred upon his Apoſtles to teach his doctrine, does in the nature of it neceſſarily imply a power of governing the ſocieties of Chriſtians, under ſuch officers, and by ſuch rules as are moſt ſuitable to the nature of ſuch a ſociety, and moſt fit to promote the great ends of the chriſtian religion: For without this power of governing, they cannot be ſuppos'd to be endowed with ſufficient authority to teach; and therefore in purſuance of this commiſſion, we find that the Apoſtles did govern the ſocieties of Chriſtians by ſuch rules and conſtitutions, as were fitted to the preſent circumſtances of Chriſtianity. And as they did appoint temporary officers upon emergent occaſions, ſo they conſtituted others that were of perpetual uſe in the church, for the inſtructing and governing of Chriſtians, and that in ſuch a ſubordination to one another, as would be moſt effectual to the attaining of the end of government; which ſubordination of governors, hath not only been uſed in all religions, but in all the well-regulated civil ſocieties that ever were in the world. And this may ſuffice to have ſpoken of the ſecond part of their commiſſion.

The *third* and *laſt* thing in the text, is the promiſe which our Saviour here makes for the encouragement of the Apoſtles in this work; *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*; that is, tho' I be going from you in perſon, yet I will ſtill be preſent with you by my power and ſpirit. And ſurely this muſt needs be a great encouragement to have him engaged for their aſſiſtance, *who had all power in heaven and earth committed to him*, as he tells them at the 18*th verſe*.

I ſhall endeavour therefore, as far as the time will permit, to explain to you the true meaning and extent of this promiſe. That it is primarily made to the Apoſtles, no man can doubt, that conſiders, that it was ſpoken to them immediately by our Saviour; and in regard to them, the meaning of it is plainly this, that our Saviour would ſend down the Holy Ghoſt upon them, in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the more ſpeedy planting and propagating of the Goſpel in the world, and that he would be with them, and aſſiſt them extraordinarily in this work.

And that this is the primary meaning of it, in regard to the Apoſtles, will be very plain, by conſidering how this promiſe is expreſt by the other Evangeliſts; *Mark* xvi. 17. inſtead of this promiſe, you have theſe words immediately after our Saviour had given them commiſſion to go and preach the Goſpel, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the Goſpel to every creature: He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.* And then it follows, *Theſe ſigns ſhall follow them that believe; in my name they ſhall caſt out devils, and ſhall ſpeak with new tongues.* And *Luke* xxiv. 49. inſtead of, *Lo, I am with you*, it is ſaid, *Behold, I ſend the promiſe of my Father upon you*; that is, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; for it follows in the next words, *but tarry in the city of Jeruſalem, until ye be endowed with power from on high.* This St. *Luke* himſelf interprets of the promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt, *Acts* i. 4, 5. *He commanded them that they ſhould not depart from Jeruſalem, but wait for the promiſe of the Father, which,* *ſaith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye ſhall be baptized with the holy Ghoſt, not many days hence.* And *v.* 8. *Ye ſhall receive power after that the holy Ghoſt is come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt part of the earth.* So that no man that compares theſe texts together, can doubt, but that this was the primary meaning of this promiſe, as it was made to the Apoſtles.

But then it is as plain likewiſe, that this promiſe is to be extended farther than to the perſons of the Apoſtles, even to all thoſe that ſhould afterwards ſucceed them in this work of preaching the Goſpel, and baptizing, becauſe our Saviour adds, *that he would be with them to the end of the world:* which words, becauſe they reach far beyond the Apoſtles times, (as I ſhall ſhew by and by) muſt neceſſarily be extended to ſuch perſons in after-ages, as ſhould carry on the ſame work.

There are two famous controverſies about the ſenſe of theſe words, in which this promiſe is expreſt.

The *firſt* is, concerning the circumſtance of time mention'd in this promiſe, *alway, to the end of the world.*

The other concerning the ſubſtance of the promiſe itſelf, what is meant by our Saviour's *being with them*, In the *firſt* we have to deal with the Enthuſiaſts; in the latter with the Papiſts. I ſhall examine the pretences of both theſe, as briefly and plainly as I can.

Firſt, Concerning the circumſtance of time expreſt in theſe words, *Alway, to the end of the world.* The Enthuſiaſts would perſuade us, that the meaning of theſe phraſes is not to be extended beyond that age, and that this promiſe is to be limited to the Apoſtles perſons, and that the ſenſe of it is, that Chriſt would be with the Apoſtles πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, all their days, ſo long as they ſhould live, and that would be, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, to the end of that age; thus they tranſlate it, and with no worſe deſign than to take away the neceſſity of a goſpel-miniſtry.

But this pretence will vaniſh, if we can make good theſe *two* things:

1. That the letter of this promiſe extends further than the perſons of the Apoſtles, and the continuance of that age.

2. However that be, it is certain that the reaſon of it extends to all that ſhould ſucceed them in their miniſtry, to the end of the world.

1. The letter of this promiſe extends farther than the perſons of the Apoſtles, and the continuance of that age. I will eaſily grant that the phraſe πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, ſignifies only *continually*; *I will be with you continually*; but then the other phraſe ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, until the end of the world, is ſeveral times in Scripture undeniably uſed for the end and diſſolution of all things, and cannot with any probability be ſhewn to be ever uſed otherwiſe. In this ſenſe it is unqueſtionably uſed three times, *Matth.* xiii. *The harveſt is the end of the world*, v. 39. *So ſhall it be at the end of the world*, v. 40. and v. 49. it is ſaid, *that at the end of the world, the Angels ſhall come forth, and ſever the wicked from the juſt, and caſt them into the furnace*; which muſt either be underſtood of the end of the world, and of the day of judgment, or there will be no clear text in the whole Bible to that purpoſe; and it is very probable, that this phraſe is uſed in the ſame ſenſe, *Matth.* xxiv. 3. where the diſciples aſk our Saviour, *What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* As will appear to any one that conſiders our Saviour's anſwer to this queſtion; the latter part whereof cannot, without too much violence, be accommodated to any thing but the final diſſolution of the world. Now if this phraſe be every where elſe in Scripture uſed in this ſenſe, there is no reaſon why it ſhould be taken otherwiſe in the text, only to ſerve the purpoſe of an unreaſonable opinion.

I know there are phraſes very near a-kin to this, which are uſed in a quite different ſenſe, namely, for the expiration of the *Jewiſh* ſtate: and that we may know how to diſtinguiſh them, it is obſervable, that when the Scripture ſpeaks of the end of the world, it is called συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος, the end of the age, in the ſingular number; but when it ſpeaks of the times before the Goſpel, it always expreſſeth them in the plural: the reaſon of which is, that famous tradition among the *Jews*, of the houſe of *Elias*, which diſtributed the whole duration of the world into three ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the Meſſias; and this laſt age they looked on with great difference from the reſt, as the famous and glorious age, which was to be as it were the beginning of a new world: And therefore the *Jews* in their writings conſtantly call it the *ſæculum futurum*, the age, or the world to come: And therefore the Apoſtle in this epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, calls the ſtate of the Goſpel by that name, as beſt known to them,

them, *Heb.* ii. 5. *But unto the Angels hath he not put in ſubjection the world to come, whereof we now ſpeak*; that is, the law was given by the diſpoſition of Angels, but the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, which is call'd the world to come, was managed and adminiſtred by the Son of God. So likewiſe *Heb* vi. 5, thoſe miraculous powers which accompanied the firſt preaching of the Goſpel, are called δυνάμεις τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, *the powers of the world to come*, that is, of the Goſpel-age.

So that this laſt age of the Goſpel, is that which the Scripture by way of eminency calls the age; thoſe that went before are conſtantly called αἰῶνες, the ages in the plural number. So we find, *Eph.* iii. 9. the Goſpel is call'd *the diſpenſation of the myſtery that was hid in God*, ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων, *from ages*; and you have the ſame phraſe, *Col.* i. 26. Upon the ſame account, the expiration of the *Jewiſh* ſtate is in Scripture call'd *the laſt times*, and *the laſt days*, Heb. i. 2. *But in theſe laſt days, God hath ſpoken to us by his Son.* 1 Cor. x. 11. *Theſe things are written for our admonition, upon whom* τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, *the ends of the ages are come.* In the ſame ſenſe the Apoſtle, *Heb.* ix, 26. ſpeaking of Chriſt ſays, that *he appeared*, ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, *at the end of the ages*, to take away ſin; that is, at the concluſion of the ages which had gone before, in the laſt age. So that if we will be governed in the interpretation of this text, by the conſtant uſe of this phraſe in Scripture, the letter of this promiſe will extend to the end of the world.

2. But however this be, it is certain that the reaſon of this promiſe does extend to all thoſe that ſhould ſucceed the Apoſtles in their miniſtry, to the end of the world; I will ſuppoſe now (to give the adverſaries their utmoſt ſcope) that which we have no reaſon to grant, that the letter of this promiſe reacheth only to the Apoſtles and their age, and that our Saviour's meaning was no more but this, that he would ſend down the holy Ghoſt upon them in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the ſpeedy planting and propagating of the Goſpel in the world, and that he would be with them till this work was done. Now ſuppoſing there were nothing more than this intended in the letter of it, this ought not much to trouble us, ſo long as it is certain, that the reaſon of it does extend to the ſucceſſors of the Apoſtles in all ages of the world. I do not mean, that the reaſon of this promiſe does give us ſufficient aſſurance, that God will aſſiſt the teachers and governors of his church in all ages, in the ſame extraordinary manner as he did the Apoſtles, becauſe there is not the like reaſon and neceſſity for it; but that we have ſufficient aſſurance from the reaſon of this promiſe, that God will not be wanting to us, in ſuch fitting and neceſſary aſſiſtance, as the ſtate of religion, and the welfare of it in every age ſhall require: For can we imagine that God will uſe ſuch extraordinary means to plant a religion in the world, and take no care of it afterwards? That he who had begun ſo good a work, ſo great and glorious a deſign, would let it fall to the ground for want of any thing that was neceſſary to the ſupport of it?

This is reaſonable in it ſelf; but we are not alſo without good ground for thus extending the general reaſon of particular promiſes beyond the letter of them. The Apoſtle hath gone before us in this, for *Heb* xiii. 5, 6. he there extends two particular promiſes of the Old Teſtament to all Chriſtians, *Let your converſation* (ſays he) *be without covetouſneſs, and be content with ſuch things as ye have: For he hath ſaid, I will never leave thee nor forſake thee.* And again, *The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.* Theſe promiſes were made to particular perſons; the firſt of them to *Joſhua*, and the other to *David*; but yet the Apoſtle applies them to all Chriſtians, and to good men in all ages, becauſe the general ground and reaſon of them extended ſo far. He who gave *Joſhua* and *David* this encouragement to their duty, will certainly be as good to us, if we do ours.

And thus I have done with the firſt controverſy about the ſenſe of theſe words, which concerns the circumſtances of time mentioned in this promiſe, *alway, to the end of the world*, and have plainly ſhewn, that both the letter and the reaſon of this promiſe does extend further than the perſons of the Apoſtles, and the continuance of that age, even to all that ſhould ſucceed them in their miniſtry to the end of the world. I come now to conſider,

Secondly, The ſubſtance of the promiſe it ſelf, namely, what is meant by our Saviour's *being with them*. And here our adverſaries of the church of *Rome* would fain perſuade us, that this promiſe is made to the church of *Rome*, and that the meaning of it is, that *that* church ſhould always be infallible, and never err in the faith. But as there is no mention of the church of *Rome* in this promiſe, nor any where elſe in ſcripture upon the like occaſion, whereby we might be directed to underſtand this promiſe to be made to that church; ſo to any unprejudiced perſon the plain and obvious ſenſe of this promiſe can be no other than this, that our Saviour having commiſſion'd the Apoſtles to go and preach the chriſtian religion in the world, he promiſes to aſſiſt them in this work, and thoſe that ſhould ſucceed them in it, *to the end of the world.* But how any man can conſtrue this promiſe, ſo as to make it ſignify the perpetual infallibility of the *Roman* church, I cannot for my life deviſe; and yet this is one of the main texts upon which they build that old and tottering fabrick of their infallibility.

Here is a general promiſe of aſſiſtance to the paſtors and governors of the church, in all ages, to the end of the world; but that this aſſiſtance ſhall always be to the degree of infallibility (as it was to the Apoſtles) can neither be concluded from the letter of this promiſe, nor from the reaſon of it; much leſs can it be from hence concluded, that the aſſiſtance here promiſed, if it were to the degree of infallibility, is to be limited and confined to the ſupreme paſtor and governor of the *Roman* church.

That the aſſiſtance here promiſed ſhall always be to the degree of infallibility, can by no means be concluded from the letter of this promiſe. Indeed there is no pretence or colour for it; he muſt have a very peculiar ſagacity, that can find out in theſe words, *I am with you always*, a promiſe of infallible aſſiſtance. Is not the promiſe which God made to *Joſhua*, and which the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* applies to all Chriſtians, and to all good men in all ages, *I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee*, the very ſame in ſenſe with this, *I will be with you always?* And yet ſurely no man did ever imagine, that by virtue of this promiſe, every Chriſtian, and every good man is infallible.

But neither can it be inferr'd from the reaſon of this promiſe, that this aſſiſtance ſhall always be to the degree of infallibillity. It was ſo indeed to the Apoſtles; the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghoſt, which were beſtowed upon them for the more ſpeedy and effectual planting and propagating of the goſpel in the world, were a divine teſtimony and confirmation to the doctrine which they delivered; and having this divine teſtimony given to them, we are certain that they were ſecured from error in the delivery of that doctrine. So that the Apoſtles had no other infallibility, but what depended upon, and was evidenced by the miraculous gifts wherewith they were endowed; and therefore without the like gifts, none can with reaſon pretend to the like infallibility: For infallibility ſignifies an extraordinary aſſiſtance of God's Spirit, whereby thoſe who are thus aſſiſted are ſecured from error. This every confident man may, if he pleaſeth, pretend to; but no man is to be believed to have it, but he who can give ſuch evidence of it, as is fit to ſatisfy reaſonable men, that he hath it. Now the only ſufficient evidence of ſuch an extraordinary divine aſſiſtance is the power of miracles. This indeed is the great external teſtimony of a teacher come from God, *if he do ſuch works as none can do, except God be with him*; and this evidence the Prophets of old, and our Saviour, and his Apoſtles always gave of their infallibility. And if the Pope and general Councils can give the teſtimony of ſuch miracles for their infallibility, as *Moſes*, and our Saviour, and his Apoſtles did work, we are ready to acknowledge it. Such a teſtimony as this would give the world a thouſand times more ſatisfaction concerning their infallibility, than all the ſubtle arguments of *Bellarmine*, and all their writers. But if they cannot, they may diſpute about it to the end of the world; and every man that hath but the ſame confidence, may pretend to it with as much reaſon as they do.

But to proceed in my argument; here is a plain reaſon why this extraordinary aſſiſtance ſhould be granted to the Apoſtles at firſt; and another reaſon as plain, why it ſhould not be continued afterwards. It was reaſonable, and in ſome degree neceſſary, that the Apoſtles ſhould be thus aſſiſted at the firſt publication of the Goſpel, namely, to give ſatisfaction to the world, that they were faithful and true witneſſes of the doctrine and miracles of Chriſt. But ſince this doctrine and theſe miracles are recorded to poſterity by thoſe very perſons that were thus aſſiſted, here is as plain a reaſon, why, after the Goſpel was planted and eſtabliſh'd in the world, this infallibility ſhould ceaſe. So long as we have an infallible foundation of faith, namely, the divine revelation conſigned in writing, and tranſmitted down to us by teſtimony of undoubted credit, what need is there now of a fixt and ſtanding infallibility in the church? But having handled this argument more at large elſewhere, I ſhall inſiſt no further upon it here.

I have now done with the *three* things I propounded to diſcourſe upon from this text. You have heard what authority our Saviour had given him; what commiſſion he gave to his diſciples; and what aſſiſtance he hath promiſed to the paſtors and governors of his church to the end of the world: namely, ſuch an aſſiſtance as is ſuitable to the exigencies of the church, in the ſeveral ages and ſtates of Chriſtianity; which aſſiſtance was at firſt very extraordinary and miraculous. God was pleaſed to *give witneſs* to the firſt teachers and publiſhers of the Goſpel, *with ſigns and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the holy Ghoſt*; and this at firſt was in a very great degree neceſſary, it not being otherwiſe imaginable, how Chriſtianity could have born up againſt all that force and violent oppoſition which was raiſed againſt it: But this extraordinary aſſiſtance was but a temporary and tranſient diſpenſation. God did, as it were, paſs by *in the ſtrong and mighty wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire: but he* was *in the ſtill voice*; that is, he deſigned to ſettle and continue that diſpenſation, in that more calm and ſecret way of aſſiſtance, which offers leſs violence to the nature of man, but which was intended for the conſtant and permanent diſpenſation. So that we have no reaſon to think, that God hath now forſaken his church, though he be not with it in ſo ſenſible and extraordinary a manner.

But then if any particular church deſire and expect this bleſſed preſence and aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit, we muſt remember, that there is a condition to be performed on our parts. For how abſolute ſoever this promiſe may be, in reſpect of the church univerſal; it is certainly conditional to any particular church, as ſad experience in many inſtances hath ſhewn. God hath long ſince left the church of *Jeruſalem*, where the Goſpel was firſt publiſh'd; he hath left the church of *Antioch*, where the believers of the Goſpel were firſt call'd *Chriſtians*; he hath left the famous churches of *Aſia*, to that degree of deſolation, that the ruins and places of ſome of them are hardly at this day certainly known. And this may alſo be the fate of any particular church, not excepting *Rome* her ſelf, for all her pride and confidence to the contrary. *Behold therefore the goodneſs and ſeverity of God: towards them that fell, ſeverity; but towards us goodneſs, if we continue in his goodneſs, otherwiſe we alſo ſhall be cut off.*

This, as I obſerved before, is ſpoken particularly to the *Roman* church; the Apoſtle ſuppoſeth that the church of *Rome* her ſelf may be guilty of apoſtacy from the faith, and cut off by unbelief, and indeed ſeems to foretel it; which how it conſiſts with their confident pretence to infallibility, let them look to it.

And let all particular churches look to themſelves that they do not forfeit this promiſe of divine aſſiſtance. For Chriſt hath not ſo tied himſelf to any particular church, but that, if they forſake him, he may leave them, and *remove his candleſtick from them.* There have been many ſad inſtances of this, ſince the firſt planting of Chriſtianity; and we have no ſmall reaſon to apprehend that it may come to be our own caſe; for certainly we have many of thoſe marks of ruin among us, which did foretel the deſtruction of the *Jewiſh* church and nation; horrible profaneneſs and contempt of religion, diviſion and animoſities to the higheſt degree, and an univerſal diſſoluteneſs and corruption of manners. And why ſhould we, who do the ſame things, think our ſelves exempted from the ſame fate? What can we expect, but that God ſhould deal with us, as he did with them, *take away the kingdom of God from us, and give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it?*

The condition of this great promiſe here in the text, to the paſtors and governors of the chriſtian church, is the faithful execution of their commiſſion; if they do ſincerely endeavour to gain men to the belief and practice of Chriſtianity, Chriſt hath promiſed to be with them. The performance of this condition doth primarily concern the chief governors of the church, and next to them the miniſters of the Goſpel in general, that they ſhould be diligent and faithful in their reſpective ſtations, *teaching men to obſerve all things, whatſoever Chriſt hath commanded.* And if we would make this our great work, to inſtruct our reſpective charges in the neceſſary doctrines of faith, and the indiſpenſable duties of a good life, we ſhould have far leſs trouble with them about other matters. And that we may do this work effectually, we muſt be ſerious in our inſtructions and exemplary in our Lives. *Serious in our inſtructions*; this certainly the Apoſtle requires in the higheſt degree, when he chargeth miniſters, *ſo to ſpeak, as the oracles of God*; to which nothing can be more contrary, than to trifle with the word of God, and to ſpeak of the weightieſt matters in the world, the great and everlaſting concernments of the ſouls of men, in ſo ſlight and indecent a manner, as is not only beneath the gravity of the pulpit, but even of a well-regulated ſtage. Can any thing be more unſuitable, than to hear a miniſter of God from this ſolemn place to break jeſts upon ſin, and to quibble upon the vices of the ages? This is to ſhoot without a bullet, as if we had no mind to do execution, but only to make men ſmile at the mention of their faults; this is ſo nauſeous a folly, and of ſo pernicious conſequence to religion, that hardly any thing too ſevere can be ſaid of it.

And then, if we would have our Inſtructions effectual, we muſt be *exemplary in our lives. Ariſtotle* tells, that the manners of the ſpeaker have κυριωτάτην πίστιν, the moſt ſovereign power of perſuaſion. And therefore *Cato* puts it into the difinition of an orator, that he is *vir bonus, dicendi peritus, a good man, and an eloquent ſpeaker.* This is true as to all kinds of perſuaſion; the good opinion which men have of the ſpeaker, gives great weight to his words, and does ſtrangely diſpoſe the minds of men to entertain his counſels. But the reputation of goodneſs is more eſpecially neceſſary and uſeful to thoſe whoſe proper work it is to perſuade men to be good; and therefore the Apoſtle, when he had charged *Titus* to put men in mind of their duty, he immediately adds, *in all things ſhewing thyſelf a pattern of good works.* None ſo fit to teach others their duty, and none ſo likely to gain men to it, as thoſe who practiſe it themſelves; becauſe hereby we convince men that we are in earneſt, when they ſee that we perſuade them to nothing, but what we chuſe to do ourſelves. This is the way to *ſtop the mouths of men*, and to confute their malice, by an exemplary piety and virtue. So St. *Peter* tells us, 1 *Pet.* ii. 15. *For ſo is the will of God, that by well doing ye put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.*

SERMON LXXI.

The Difficulties of a Chriſtian Life conſidered.

LUKE xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

THERE are two great miſtakes about the nature of religion, equally falſe, and equally pernicious to the ſouls of men: and the devil, whoſe great deſign it is to keep men off from religion by any means, makes uſe of both theſe miſtakes, to ſerve his own purpoſe and deſign upon the ſeveral tempers of men. Thoſe who are melancholy and ſerious, he diſheartens and diſcourageth from attempting it, by the extreme trouble and difficulty of it, repreſenting it in ſo horrid and frightful a ſhape, incumber'd with ſuch difficulties, and attended with ſuch troubles and ſufferings, as are inſuperable, and intolerable to human nature; whereby he perſuades men, that they had better never attempt it, ſince they may deſpair to go through with it.

On the other hand, thoſe who are ſanguine and full of hopes, he poſſeſſes with a quite contrary apprehenſion; that the buſineſs of religion is ſo ſhort and eaſy a work, that it may be done at any time, and if need be, at the laſt moment of our lives, tho' it is not ſo well to put it upon the laſt hazard; and by this means a great part of mankind are lull'd in ſecurity, and adjourn the buſineſs of religion from time to time; and becauſe it is ſo eaſy, and ſo much in their power, they ſatisfy themſelves with an indeterminate reſolution to ſet about that buſineſs ſome time or other before they die, and ſo to repent, and make their peace with God once for all.

Theſe pretences contradict one another, and therefore cannot be both true; but they may both be falſe, as indeed they are, and truth lies between them; religion being neither ſo ſlight and eaſy a work as ſome would have it, nor ſo extremely difficult and intolerable as others would repreſent it. To confute the falſe apprehenſions which ſome have of the eaſineſs of it, our Saviour tells us, there muſt be ſome *ſtriving*; and to ſatisfy us, that the difficulties of religion are not ſo great and inſuperable, as ſome would make them, our Saviour tells us, that thoſe who *ſtrive* ſhall ſucceed and *enter in*; but thoſe who only *ſeek*, that is, do not vigorouſly ſet about the buſineſs of religion, but only make ſome faint attempts to get to heaven, *ſhall not be able to enter in. Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, but ſhall not be able.*

The occaſion of which words of our bleſſed Saviour, was a queſtion that was put to him by one of his Diſciples, concerning the number of thoſe that ſhould be ſaved, *v.* 23. One ſaid unto him, *Lord, are there few that be ſaved?* To which curious queſtion, our Saviour (according to his manner, when ſuch kind of queſtions were put to him) does not give a direct anſwer, becauſe it was neither neceſſary nor uſeful for his hearers to be reſolved in; it did not concern them to know what number of perſons ſhould be ſaved, but what courſe they ſhould take, that they might be of that number; and therefore, inſtead of ſatisfying their curioſities, he puts them upon their duty; admoniſhing them, inſtead of concerning themſelves what ſhould become of others, to take care of themſelves. *And he ſaid unto*

unto them, ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able. He does not ſay, that *but few ſhall be ſaved*; (as ſome have preſumptuouſly ventur'd to determine) but only *few* in compariſon of thoſe *many that ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

In theſe words we may conſider theſe *two* things:

Firſt, The duty enjoined, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.*

Secondly, The reaſon or argument to enforce it, *For many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

Firſt, The duty enjoined, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.* Which words being metaphorical, I ſhall ſtrip them of the metaphor, that ſo we may ſee the plain meaning of them. Now by this metaphor, or rather allegory, theſe *three* things are plainly intended:

1ſt, The courſe of a holy and chriſtian life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happineſs, is here repreſented to us by *a way*, which every man that would come to heaven, muſt walk in. For ſo St. *Matt.* (who expreſſeth this more fully) makes mention of *a way*, as well as *a gate*, by which we muſt enter into it; *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life.* And this, tho' it be not expreſs'd by St. *Luke*, is neceſſarily underſtood, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate*, that is, into the *way* that leads to *life.*

2dly, The firſt difficulties of a holy and religious courſe of life, are here repreſented to us by a *ſtrait gate.* For the gate at which we enter, and the way in which we walk, can ſignify nothing elſe, but the beginning and progreſs of a holy and religious courſe.

3dly, Our diligence and conſtancy in this courſe, are repreſented by *ſtriving*, a word which hath a great force and emphaſis in it, ἀγωνίζεσθε, a metaphor taken from the earneſt contention which was uſed in the *Olympic* games, by thoſe who ſtrove for maſtery in running or wreſtling, or any of the other exerciſes which were there uſed.

Secondly, Here is a reaſon added to enforce the exhortation or duty; *for many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able:* that is, there are a great many that will do ſomething in Chriſtianity, and make ſome faint attempts to get to heaven, who yet ſhall fall ſhort of it, for want of ſuch a firm reſolution and earneſtneſs of endeavour, as is neceſſary to the attaining of it.

Having thus explain'd the words, I ſhall take occaſion from the firſt part of them, namely, the duty or exhortation, to handle theſe *three* points, very uſeful for us to conſider, and to be well inſtructed in:

1ſt, The difficulties of a holy and chriſtian courſe.

2dly, The firm reſolution and earneſt endeavour that is required on our part for the conquering of theſe difficulties.

3dly, That theſe difficulties are not ſo great and inſuperable, as to be a juſt diſcouragement to our endeavours; if we will *ſtrive*, we may maſter them.

Firſt, The difficulties of a holy and chriſtian courſe. And theſe are either from our ſelves, or from ſomething without us.

1. From ourſelves, from the original corruption and depravation of our nature, and the power of evil habits and cuſtoms, contracted by vicious practices. Our natures are vitiated and depraved, inclined to evil, and impotent to good; beſides, that being habituated to ſin and vice, it is a matter of infinite difficulty to break off a cuſtom, and to turn the courſe of our life another way. Now becauſe this is the difficulty of our firſt entrance into religion, it is repreſented by a *ſtrait gate*, which is hard to get through.

2. There are likewiſe other difficulties from without; as namely, the oppoſition and perſecution of the world, which was very raging and violent in the firſt beginnings of Chriſtianity. And this our Saviour repreſents by the ruggedneſs and roughneſs of the way, as St. *Matthew* expreſſeth it, *chap.* vii. 14. *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life*, Καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς, *confragoſa eſt via*, (ſo *Grotius* renders it) the way is craggy, full of afflictions and troubles.

So that theſe are the two great difficulties in a chriſtian courſe, indiſpoſition from within, and oppoſition from without.

1. Indiſpoſition from within. And this makes religion ſo much the more difficult, becauſe it checks us at our very firſt entrance upon our chriſtian courſe, and makes us unwilling to ſet out. The corruption of our nature, and thoſe vicious habits which by a long cuſtom of ſin we have contracted, do ſtrongly incline us to the contrary way, ſo that a man muſt offer great force and violence to himſelf, that will conquer this difficulty. It is one of the hardeſt things in the world to break off a vicious habit, and to get looſe from the tyranny of cuſtom. The Prophet *Jeremiah* ſpeaks of it as next to a natural impoſſibility, *Ch.* xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin? Or the Leopard his ſpots? Then may*

ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil. This requires great ſtriving indeed. Nothing ſhews the ſpirit and reſolution of a man more, than to contend with an inveterate habit; for in this caſe a man ſtrives againſt the very bent and inclination of his ſoul; and 'tis eaſier to ſet a man againſt all the world, than to make him fight with himſelf: and yet this every man muſt do, who from any wicked courſe of life, betakes himſelf ſeriouſly to religion; he muſt as it were lay violent hands upon himſelf, and fight with the man he was before; and this in Scripture is emphatically expreſt to us, *by crucifying the old man, with the affections and luſts thereof.* A Chriſtian when he firſt enters upon a holy and good courſe of life, is repreſented as two perſons and parties at civil wars one with another, *the old*, and *the new man*; ſo that whoever will be a Chriſtian muſt put off himſelf, and become another man; and 'tis no eaſy matter for a man to quit himſelf.

2. In our chriſtian courſe, we muſt likewiſe expect to meet with great oppoſition from without. Bleſſed be God, Chriſtianity hath generally been for many ages free from this difficulty, which attended the firſt profeſſion of it; it was then indeed a very ſteep and craggy way, very rough and thorny, not to be travelled in without ſweat and blood; then the dangers and hazards of the profeſſion were ſuch, as were not to be encountered by a mere moral reſolution, and the natural ſtrength of fleſh and blood; the perſecution that attended it was ſo hot, and the torments which threaten'd it ſo terrible, that the ſenſual and inconſiderate part of mankind would rather venture hell at a diſtance, than ruſh themſelves upon ſo preſent and evident a danger.

But ſince theſe ages of perſecution, this difficulty hath been in a great meaſure removed. Not but the true religion hath ſtill its enemies in the world; but they are not let looſe, as they were in thoſe times: it is ſtill perſecuted and expoſed to the malice and reproach, but not to the rage and fury of unreaſonable Men. In the calmeſt times there is hardly any man can be a ſtrict and ſincere Chriſtian, without being liable to hatred and contempt, without denying himſelf many of thoſe worldly advantages, which thoſe who make no conſcience of the ſtrict laws of Chriſtianity may make to themſelves; ſo that at all times it requires a good degree of conſtancy and reſolution to perſevere in a holy courſe, and to bear up againſt the oppoſition of the world, and to withſtand its temptations, to be *harmleſs and blameleſs in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation*; not to be infected with the eminent and frequent examples of vice, and carried down with the ſtream of a corrupt and degenerate age. So that tho' our difficulties be not always the ſame, and equal to thoſe which the primitive Chriſtians encountered, yet there is enough to exerciſe our beſt reſolution and care; tho' the main body of the enemies of Chriſtianity be broken, and *the Sons of Anak be deſtroyed out of the land*; *yet ſome of the old inhabitants are ſtill left, to be thorns in our ſides, and pricks in our eyes,* that true religion may always have ſomething to exerciſe its force and vigour upon. I have done with the *firſt* point, and the difficulties of a chriſtian courſe. I proceed to the

Second, The earneſt endeavour that is to be uſed on our part, for the conquering of theſe difficulties. And to the buſineſs of religion, if we will ſet upon it in good earneſt, theſe *three* things are required:

1ſt, A mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and chriſtian courſe.
2dly, Great diligence and induſtry to carry us on in it.
3dly, An invincible conſtancy to carry us through it, and make us perſevere in it to the end.

1ſt, A mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and good courſe. For want of this, moſt men miſcarry and ſtumble at the very threſhold, and never get through the *ſtrait gate*, never maſter the difficulties of the firſt entrance. Many are well diſpoſed towards religion, and have fits of good inclination that way, (eſpecially in their young and tender years) but they want firmneſs of reſolution to conquer the difficulties of the firſt entrance upon a religious and virtuous life; like the young man that came to our Saviour, well inclined to do ſome *good thing*, that *he might inherit eternal life*; but when it came to the point, he gave back, he was divided betwixt Chriſt and the world, and had not reſolution enough *to part with all for him.*

Many men (I doubt not) have frequent thoughts and deliberations about a better courſe of life, and are in a good mind to take up, and break off that lewd and riotous courſe they are in; but they cannot bring themſelves to a fixt purpoſe and reſolution: and yet without this nothing is to be done, *the double minded man is unſtable in all his ways.* There muſt be no indifferency and irreſoluteneſs in our minds, if we will be Chriſtians; we muſt not ſtop at the *gate*, but reſolve to preſs in. We ſee that men take up peremptory reſolutions in other matters, to be rich and great in the world, and they can be true and ſtedfaſt to theſe reſolutions; and why ſhould not men reſolve to be wiſe and happy, and ſtand to theſe reſolutions and make them good? God is more ready to aſſiſt and ſtrengthen theſe kind of reſolutions than any other; and I am ſure no man hath ſo much reaſon to reſolve upon any thing, as to live a holy and virtuous life; no other reſolution can do a man that good, and bring him that comfort and happineſs that this will.

2dly, The buſineſs of religion, as it requires a mighty reſolution to engage us in a holy and good courſe, ſo likewiſe a great diligence to carry us on in it. When we are got through the *ſtrait gate*, we muſt account to meet with many difficulties in our way; there are in the courſe of a chriſtian life many duties to be performed, which require great pains and care; many temptations to be reſiſted, which will keep us continually upon our guard; a great part of the way is up hill, and not to be climb'd without labour; and the Scripture frequently calls upon us, *to work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling*; that is, with great care and induſtry; *to give all diligence to make our calling and election ſure*; to follow holineſs; διώκειν, to purſue it with great earneſtneſs. Nothing in this world that is of value, is to be had on other terms; and we have low thoughts of heaven, if we think any pains too much to get thither.

3dly, The buſineſs of religion requires an invincible conſtancy to carry us through it, and to make us perſevere in it to the end. Reſolution may make a good entrance; but it requires great conſtancy and firmneſs of mind, to hold out in a good courſe. A good reſolution may be taken up upon a preſent heat and may cool again; but nothing but a conſtant and ſteady temper of mind will make a man perſevere; and yet without this, no man ſhall ever reach heaven. *He that continueth to the end ſhall be ſaved*; *but if any man draw back, God's ſoul will have no pleaſure in him.* God puts this caſe by the Prophet, and determines it, *Ezekiel* xviii. 24. *When the righteous man turneth away from his righteouſneſs, ſhall he live? all his righteouſneſs that he hath done, ſhall not be mentioned; in his treſpaſs that he hath treſpaſſed, and in his ſin that he hath ſinned, in them he ſhall die*; nay, ſo far will his righteouſneſs be from availing him, if he do not perſevere in it, that it will render his condition much worſe, to have gone ſo far towards heaven, and at laſt to turn his back upon it. So St. *Peter* tells us, 2 *Pet.* ii. 20, 21. *For if after they have eſcaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* I proceed to the

Third point, namely, That the difficulties of a holy and a chriſtian life are not ſo great and inſuperable, as to be a juſt ground of diſcouragement to our endeavours. All that I have ſaid concerning the difficulties of religion, was with no deſign to damp, but rather to quicken our induſtry; for, upon the whole matter, when all things are duly conſidered, it will appear, that *Chriſt's yoke is eaſy, and his burthen light*; *that the commandments of God are not grievous*; no, not this commandment of *ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate*; which I ſhall endeavour to make manifeſt by taking theſe *four* things into conſideration.

1. The aſſiſtance which the Goſpel offers to us. God hath there promiſed *to give his holy Spirit to them that aſk him*; and by the aſſiſtance of God's holy Spirit, we may be able to conquer all thoſe difficulties. Indeed if we were left to our ſelves, to the impotency and weakneſs of our own nature, we ſhould never be able to cope with theſe difficulties; every temptation would be too hard for us; every little oppoſition would diſcourage us; but *God is with us*, and *there is nothing too hard for him.* If the principles of a holy life were only the birth of our own reſolution, they would eaſily be born down; but they are from God, of a heavenly birth and original; and whatſoever is *born of God*, *overcometh the world.* John i. 12, 13. *As many as received him, to them gave he power* (ἐξουσίαν the privilege) *to become the ſons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

God conſiders the impotency of human nature, in this depraved and degenerate ſtate into which we are ſunk, and therefore he hath left us to our ſelves; but when he commands us to *work out our own ſalvation*, he tells us for our encouragement, that *he himſelf works in us both to will and to do*; he does not bid us to be ſtrong in our own ſtrength, for he knows we have no ſtrength of our own, but to be *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*; and what may not even a weak creature do, that is ſo powerfully aſſiſted? If we will but make uſe of this ſtrength, nothing can be too hard for us. All that God expects from us is, that we ſhould comply with the motions of his Spirit, and be as ſincere in the uſe of our own endeavours, as he is in the offers of his grace and aſſiſtance.

2. Let us conſider, that the greateſt difficulties are at firſt; 'tis but making one manful onſet, and ſuſtaining the firſt brunt, and the difficulties will abate and grow leſs, and our ſtrength will every day increaſe and grow more. *The gate is ſtrait:* but when we have once got thro' it, *our feet will be ſet in an open place.* After ſome ſtruggling to get through, we ſhall every day find our ſelves at more eaſe and liberty. It will be very hard at firſt, to maſter our vitious inclinations, to change the habit of our minds, and the courſe of our lives, and to act contrary to what we have been long accuſtomed: but this trouble laſts but for a little while; theſe pangs of the new-birth, tho' they be ſharp, yet they are not uſually of long continuance.

It does indeed require great reſolution and firmneſs of mind, to encounter the firſt difficulties of religion: but if we can but ſtand it out for one brunt, our enemy will give way, and the pleaſure of victory will tempt us on. It is troubleſome to conflict with great difficulties, and men are loth to be brought to it: but when we are engaged, it is one of the greateſt pleaſures in the world to prevail and conquer. Many men are loth to go to war; but after a little ſucceſs, they are as loth to give over; that which was a terror to them at firſt, turns into a pleaſure.

3. Conſider that cuſtom will make any courſe of life tolerable, and moſt things eaſy. Religion, and the practice of a holy life is difficult at firſt; but after we are once habituated to it, the trouble will wear off by degrees, and that which was grievous will become eaſy; nay, by degrees, much more pleaſant than ever the contrary practice was. We ſee the daily experience of this, in the moſt difficult and laborious employments of this world; a little pains tires a man at firſt, but when he is once ſeaſoned and inured to labour, idleneſs becomes more tedious and troubleſome to him than the hardeſt work. Cuſtom will make any thing eaſy, tho' it be a little unnatural. Nothing is more unnatural than ſin; 'tis not according to our original nature and frame, but it is the corruption and depravation of it, a ſecond nature ſuperinduced upon us by cuſtom; whereas the practice of holineſs and virtue is agreeable to our original and primitive ſtate; and ſin and vice are the perverting of nature contrary to our reaſon, and the deſign of our beings, and to all obligations of duty and intereſt: but by returning to God and our duty, we return to our primitive ſtate; we act naturally, and according to the intention of our beings; and when the force of a contrary cuſtom is taken off, and the biaſs clapt on the other ſide, *we ſhall run the ways of God's commandments with more delight* and ſatisfaction, than ever we found in the ways of ſin.

For ſin is a violence upon our natures, and that is always uneaſy, yet it is made more tolerable by cuſtom: but religion reſtores men to their natural ſtate, and then we are at eaſe and reſt. Religion is at firſt *a yoke and burthen:* but unleſs we *take this upon us,* we ſhall never *find reſt to our ſouls.*

4thly and *laſtly,* Conſider the reward that religion propounds, and this muſt needs ſweeten and mitigate all the troubles and difficulties that are occaſioned by it. This *ſtrait gate* through which we much enter, and this *craggy way* which we are to climb up, *leads to life,* and he is a lazy man indeed, that will not ſtrive and ſtruggle for *life.* All that a man can do, he will do for his life, for this miſerable life which is ſo ſhort and uncertain, and *born to trouble as the ſparks fly upwards;* a life not worth the having, nor worth the keeping with any great care and trouble; if it were not in order to a better and happier life. But 'tis not this life which our Saviour means; that indeed were not worth all this ſtriving for: 'Tis eternal life; a ſtate of perfect and endleſs happineſs; of *joys unſpeakable and full of glory.* And who would not *ſtrive to enter in at that gate,* which leads to ſo much felicity? Can a man poſſibly take too much pains, be at too much trouble for a few days, to be happy for ever?

So often as I conſider what incredible induſtry men uſe for the things of this life, and to get a ſmall portion of this world, I am ready to conclude, that either men do not believe the rewards of another world, or that they do not underſtand them; elſe they could not think much to be at the ſame pains for heaven, that they can chearfully beſtow for the obtaining of theſe corruptible things. Can we be ſo unconſcionable, as to think God unreaſonable, when he offers heaven and everlaſting happineſs to us upon as eaſy terms, as any thing in the world is ordinarily to be had? And are not we very fooliſh and unwiſe, to put away eternal life from us, when we may have it upon terms ſo infinitely below the true worth and value of it?

I have now done with the *three* things which I propounded to ſpeak to from the firſt part of theſe words, which are ſo many arguments to enforce the exhortation here in the text; *to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate,* and to give all diligence, by the courſe of a holy and virtuous life, to get to heaven; and we may aſſure our ſelves, that nothing leſs than this will bring us thither. So our Saviour tells us, in the latter part of the text; that *many ſhall ſeek to enter in and ſhall not be able.* I proceed now to the

Second part of the text; the reaſon or argument whereby this exhortation is enforced; *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* Every *ſeeking* to *enter in* will not gain our admiſſion into heaven; therefore there muſt be *ſtriving:* For men may do many things in religion, and make ſeveral faint attempts to get to heaven, and yet at laſt fall ſhort of it, for want of that earneſt contention and endeavour, which is neceſſary to the attaining of it. We muſt make religion our buſineſs, and ſet about it with all our might, and perſevere and hold out in it, if ever we hope to be admitted to heaven; *for many ſhall ſeek to enter,* that ſhall be *ſhut out.*

Now what this *ſeeking* is, which is here oppoſed to *ſtriving to enter in at the ſtrait gate,* our Saviour declares after the text; *v.* 25. *When once the maſter of the houſe is riſen up, and hath ſhut to the door, and ye begin to ſtand without, and knock at the door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he ſhall anſwer and ſay unto you, I know you not whence ye are; then ſhall ye begin to ſay, we have eaten and drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in our ſtreets; but he ſhall ſay, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.* St. *Matthew* mentions ſome other pretences which they ſhould make; upon which they ſhould lay claim to heaven, *Mat.* vii. 21, 22, 23. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will ſay unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have caſt out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* After all their ſeeking to enter in, and notwithſtanding all theſe pretences, they ſhall be ſhut out, and be for ever baniſh'd from the preſence of God. This ſhall be their doom, which will be much the heavier, becauſe of the diſappointment of their confident expectation and hope. So St. *Luke* tells us,—xiii. 28, 29. *There ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth; when ye ſhall ſee Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and ye your ſelves thruſt out. And they ſhall come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and from the north, and from the ſouth, and ſhall ſit down in the kingdom of God.* To which St. *Matthew* adds, Chap. viii. 12. *But the children of the kingdom ſhall be caſt into utter darkneſs, there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth.* And then our Saviour concludes (*Luke* xiii. 30.) *Behold, there are laſt that ſhall be firſt, and firſt which ſhall be laſt.* From all which it appears, with what confidence many men, upon theſe falſe pretences (which our Saviour calls *ſeeking to enter in*) ſhall lay claim to heaven, and how ſtrangely they ſhall be diſappointed of their expectation and hope; when they ſhall find themſelves caſt out of heaven, who they thought had outdone all others in religion, and were the only members of the true church, and *the children and heirs of the kingdom;* and ſhall ſee others, whom they thought to be out of the pale of the true church, and excluded from all terms of ſalvation, come from all quarters, and find free admiſſion into heaven; and ſhall find themſelves ſo groſly and widely miſtaken, that thoſe very perſons whom they thought to be *laſt,* and of all others fartheſt from ſalvation, ſhall be *firſt;* and they themſelves, whom they took for *the children of the kingdom,* and ſuch as ſhould be admitted into heaven in the firſt place, ſhall be rejected and caſt out.

So that by *ſeeking to enter,* we may underſtand all thoſe things which men may do in religion upon which they ſhall pretend to lay claim to heaven, nay, and confidently hope to obtain it; and yet ſhall be ſhamefully diſappointed, and fall ſhort of it. Whatever men think, and believe, and do in religion, what privileges ſoever men pretend, what ways and means ſoever men endeavour to appeaſe the Deity, and to recommend themſelves to the divine favour and acceptance, all this is but *ſeeking to enter in,* and is not that *ſtriving* which our Saviour requires. *If men do not do the will of God, but are workers of iniquity,* it will all ſignify nothing to the obtaining of eternal happineſs.

Our Saviour here inſtanceth in mens profeſſion of his religion, *calling him Lord, Lord;* in their perſonal familiarity and converſation with him, by *eating and drinking in his preſence* and company; in their having heard him preach the doctrine of life and ſalvation, *Thou haſt taught in our ſtreets;* in their having propheſied, and wrought great miracles in his name and by his power, *Have we not propheſied in thy name? And in thy name caſt out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?* Theſe were great and glorious things which they boaſted of; and yet nothing of all this will do, if men *do not the will of God;* notwithſtanding all this, he will ſay unto them, *I know ye not whence ye are; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.*

And by a plain parity of reaſon, whatever elſe men do in religion, what attempts ſoever men may make to get to heaven, upon what privileges or pretences ſoever they may lay claim to eternal life, they will certainly fall ſhort of it, if they *do not do the will of God,* but *are workers of iniquity.*

quity. My buſineſs therefore at this time ſhall be, to diſcover the ſeveral falſe claims and pretences which men may make to heaven, and yet ſhall never enter into it. And to this purpoſe I ſhall inſtance in ſeveral particulars, by one or more of which men commonly delude themſelves, and are apt to entertain vain and ill-grounded hopes of eternal ſalvation.

1ſt, Some truſt to the external profeſſion of the true religion.

2dly, Others have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they rely much upon that.

3dly, There are others that find themſelves much affected with the word of God, and the doctrines contained in it.

4thly, Others are very ſtrict and devout in the external worſhip of God.

5thly, Others confide much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone ſalvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which therein they have above others of getting to heaven.

6thly, Others think their great zeal for God and his true religion, will certainly ſave them.

7thly, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion.

8thly, Others rely much upon the ſincerity of their repentance and converſion, whereby they are put into a ſtate of grace, and become the children of God, and heirs of everlaſting life; and being once truly ſo, they can never fall from that ſtate, ſo as finally to miſcarry.

Laſtly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at the laſt.

I ſhall briefly go over theſe particulars, which are the ſeveral ways whereby men *ſeek to enter* into heaven, and hope to get thither at laſt; and ſhall ſhew the inſufficiency of them; and that there is ſomething beyond all this neceſſary to be done for the attainment of everlaſting ſalvation.

1ſt, Some truſt to the mere external profeſſion of the true religion, and think it enough to call Chriſt, *Lord*, *Lord*; to be baptized in his name, and thereby to be admitted members of the chriſtian church. What the Apoſtle ſays of the profeſſion of the *Jewiſh* religion, and the outward badge of it, *circumciſion*, may be applied to the profeſſion of Chriſtianity made in baptiſm, *Rom.* ii. 17, 25, 28, 29. *Behold thou art called a Jew, and reſteſt in the law, and makeſt thy boaſt of God. Circumciſion verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumciſion is made uncircumciſion; for he is not a Jew that is one outwardly, neither is that circumciſion which is outward in the fleſh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumciſion is that of the heart, in the ſpirit, and not in the letter.* The caſe is the ſame of thoſe who make only an outward profeſſion of Chriſtianity. *Baptiſm verily profiteth, if we perform the condition of that covenant which we entered into by baptiſm*; but if we do not, *our baptiſm is no baptiſm:* For *he is not a Chriſtian which is one outwardly, nor is that baptiſm which is outward in the fleſh; But he is a Chriſtian which is one inwardly, and baptiſm is of the heart, in the ſpirit, and not in water only.* So St. *Peter* tells us, 1 *Pet.* iii. 21. that *baptiſm is not* only the waſhing of the body with water, and *the putting away of the filth of the fleſh, but the anſwer of a good conſcience towards God.*

The promiſe of eternal life and happineſs is not made to the external profeſſion of religion, without the ſincere and real practice of it. *Why call ye me, Lord, Lord,* (ſays our Saviour) *and do not the things which I ſay?* The Scripture hath no where ſaid, *he that is baptized ſhall be ſaved*; but *he that believeth and is baptized, he that repenteth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved.* This deſerves to be ſeriouſly conſidered by a great many Chriſtians, who have nothing to ſhew for their Chriſtianity, but their names; whoſe beſt title to heaven is their baptiſm, an engagement entred into by others in their name, but never confirmed and made good by any act of their own; a thing which was done before they remember, and which hath no other effect upon their hearts and lives, than if it were quite forgotten.

2dly, There are others who have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they hope *that* will ſave them. But if our knowledge in religion, though never ſo clear and great, do not deſcend into our hearts and lives, and govern our actions, all our hopes of heaven are built upon a falſe and ſandy foundation. So our Saviour tells us, *Matth.* vii. 26. *Every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh man, which built his houſe upon the ſand.* And *John* xiii. 17. *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

There is not a greater cheat in religion, nothing wherein men do more groſly impoſe upon themſelves, than in this matter; as if the knowledge of religion, without the practice of it, would bring men to heaven. How diligent are many in reading and hearing the word of God, who yet take no care to practiſe it in their lives? Like thoſe in the prophet *Ezek.* xxxiii. 31. of whom God complains, *They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they ſit before thee as my people, and they hear my words; but they will not do them.* None do ſo fooliſhly, and yet ſo deſervedly miſs of happineſs, as thoſe who are very careful to learn the way to heaven, and when they have done, will take no pains at all to get thither.

3dly, There are others who find themſelves much affected with the word of God, and the preaching of it; and this they take for a very good ſign, that it hath its due effect upon them. And this happens very frequently, that the word of God makes conſiderable impreſſions upon men for the preſent, and they are greatly affected with it, and troubled for their ſins, and afraid of the judgments of God, and the terrible vengeance of another world; and upon this they take up ſome reſolutions of a better courſe, which after a little while vaniſh and come to nothing. This was the temper of the people of *Iſrael*, they delighted to hear the Prophet ſpeak to them in the name of God, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 32. *And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely ſong of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well upon an inſtrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not.* Mark vi. 20. it is ſaid that *Herod* had a great reverence for *John* the Baptiſt, *that he obſerved him, and heard him gladly*; but yet for all that, he continued the ſame cruel and bad man that he was before. And in the parable of the ſower, *Matth.* xiii. 20. there are one ſort of hearers mentioned, who, *when they heard the word, received it with joy; but having no root in themſelves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth, becauſe of the word, preſently they are offended.* There are many men who have ſudden motions in religion, and are mightily affected for the preſent; but it muſt be a rooted and fixt principle, that will endure and hold out againſt great difficulties and oppoſition. *Acts* xxiv. 25. it is ſaid that when St. *Paul reaſoned of righteouſneſs, and temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled:* and nothing is more frequent, than for men to be mightily ſtartled at the preaching of the word, when their judgments are convinced and born down, and their conſciences touched to the quick: a lively repreſentation of the evil of ſin, and the infinite danger of a ſinful courſe, may ſtir up the paſſions of grief and fear, and dart ſuch ſtings into the conſciences of men, as may make them extremely reſtleſs and unquiet, and work ſome good thoughts and inclinations in them towards a better courſe; and yet like metals, when the heat is over, they may be the harder for having been melted down.

4thly, Others ſhew great ſtrictneſs and devotion in the worſhip of God, and this they hope will be accepted, and cannot fail to bring them to heaven: and yet ſome of the worſt of men have been very eminent for this. The *Phariſees* were the moſt exact people in the world in matter of external ceremony and devotion; and yet for all this, our Saviour plainly tells them, that *they were farther from the kingdom of God*, than thoſe who ſeemed to be fartheſt, *than publicans and harlots*; and that becauſe they were ſo very bad, under ſo great a pretence of devotion, *therefore they ſhould receive the greater damnation.*

Not but that external devotion is a neceſſary expreſſion of religion, and highly acceptable to God, when it proceeds from a pious and devout mind, and when men are really ſuch in their hearts and lives as their external devotion repreſents them to be: But when the outward garb of religion is only made a cloak for ſin and wickedneſs, when there is nothing within to anſwer all the ſhew that we ſee without, nothing is more odious and abominable to God. Theſe are mere engines and poppets in religion; all the motions we ſee without proceed from an artificial contrivance, and not from any inward principle of life; and as no creature is more ridiculous than an ape becauſe the beaſt makes ſome pretence to human ſhape, ſo nothing is more fulſome than this hypocritical devotion, becauſe it looks like religion, but is the fartheſt from it of any thing in the world.

5thly, Others confide very much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone ſalvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which they have thereby above others, of getting to heaven. Thus the *Jews* confined ſalvation to themſelves, and looked upon all the reſt of the world as excluded from it. And not only ſo, but they believed that by one means or other every *Iſraelite* ſhould be ſaved. So that they were the *Jewiſh* catholick church, out of which there was no hope of ſalvation for any.

The ſame pretence is made by ſome Chriſtians at this day, who engroſs ſalvation to themſelves, and will allow none to go to heaven out of the communion of their church; and have ſo ordered the matter, that hardly any that are in it can miſcarry. They are members of an infallible church, which cannot poſſibly err in matters of faith; *they have* not only *eat and drunk in Chriſt's preſence*, but have eat and drunk his very corporal preſence, the natural ſubſtance of his fleſh and blood; they have not only our bleſſed Saviour, but innumerable other interceſſors in heaven; they have not only their own merits to plead for them, but in caſe they be defective, they may have the merits of others aſſigned and made over to them out of the infinite ſtock and treaſure of the church, upon which they may challenge eternal life, as of right and due belonging to them; and by a due courſe of confeſſion and abſolution, may quit ſcores with God for all their ſins from time to time. Or if they have neglected all this, they may, after the moſt flagitious courſe of life, upon *attrition* (that is, upon ſome trouble for ſin, out of fear of hell and damnation) joined with *confeſſion* and *abſolution*, get to heaven at laſt; provided the prieſt mean honeſtly, and do not, for want of intention, deprive them of the ſaving benefit and effect of this ſacrament.

But is it poſſible men can be deluded at this rate! as to think that confidence of their own good condition, and want of charity to others, will carry them to heaven? That any church hath the privilege to ſave impenitent ſinners? And they are really impenitent, who do not exerciſe ſuch a repentance as the Goſpel plainly requires; and if men die in this ſtate, whatever church they are of, the great Judge of the world hath told us, that *he will not know them*, but will bid them *to depart from him, becauſe they have been workers of iniquity*.

6*thly*, Others think that their zeal for God and his true religion will certainly ſave them. But zeal, if it be not *according to knowledge*, if it be miſtaken in its object, or be irregular and exceſſive in the degree, is ſo far from being a virtue, that it may be a great ſin and fault; and tho' it be for the truth, yet if it be deſtitute of charity, and ſeparated from the virtues of a good life, it will not avail us. So St. *Paul* tells us, that *tho' a man ſhall give his body to be burnt; yet if he have not charity, it is nothing.*

7*thly*, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion, and this ſure will do the buſineſs. And it is very true, and certain in experience, that religion may have a conſiderable awe and influence upon mens hearts and lives, and yet they may fall ſhort of happineſs. Men may in many conſiderable inſtances perform their duty to God and man; and yet the retaining of one luſt, the practice of any one known ſin, may hinder them from *entering in at the ſtrait gate*. *Herod* did not only *hear John gladly*, but *did many things* in obedience to his doctrine; and yet he was a very bad man. The *Phariſee thanked God* (and it may be truly) *that he was not like other men, an extortioner, or unjuſt, or an adulterer*; and yet the penitent *Publican* was *juſtified before him*. The young man who came to our Saviour to know what he ſhould to do enter into life, and of whom our Saviour teſtifies, that he was *not far from the kingdom of God*, and that he *wanted but one thing*; yet for want of that he miſcarried. And St. *James* aſſures us, that *if a man keep the whole law, and yet fail in one point, he is guilty of all*. If we be *workers of iniquity* in any one kind, Chriſt will diſown us, and bid us *depart from him*.

8*thly*, Others rely upon the ſincerity of their repentance and converſion, whereby they are put into a ſtate of grace, from whence they can never finally fall. They did once very heartily repent of their wicked lives, and did change their courſe, and were really reformed, and continued a great while in that good courſe. And all this may be certainly true, but it is as certain that they are relapſed into their former evil courſe: and if ſo, the Prophet hath told us their doom, that *if the righteous man forſake his righteouſneſs, his righteouſneſs ſhall not be remembered; but in the ſin that he hath ſinned, in that ſhall he die.* So that a *righteous man* may *turn from his righteouſneſs, and commit iniquity, and die in it.* For the Prophet doth not here (as ſome vainly pretend) put a caſe, which is impoſſible in fact ſhould happen, unleſs they will ſay, that the other caſe which he puts together with it, of *the wicked man's turning away from his wickedneſs, and doing that which is lawful and right*, is likewiſe impoſſible, which God forbid. And that men may fall from a ſtate of grace, is no matter of diſcouragement to good men: but a good caution againſt ſecurity, and an argument to greater care and watchfulneſs; according to that of the Apoſtle, *Let him that ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall*; which admonition were ſurely to little purpoſe, if it were impoſſible for them that *ſtand* to *fall*.

Laſtly. Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at laſt. This indeed is only *to ſeek*, and not *to ſtrive to enter in*; and theſe perhaps are they whom our Saviour repreſents as *ſtanding without, and knocking at the door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us*; or, as St. *Matthew* expreſſes it, *Many ſhall ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord*; which is moſt probably meant of the day of judgment, when their caſe is brought to the laſt extremity; and next to that is the day of death, when men are entering into a ſtate of endleſs happineſs or miſery. And no wonder, if the ſinner would then be glad, when he can no longer continue in this world, to be admitted into happineſs in the next: but the door is then ſhut to moſt ſinners, and it is a miracle of God's grace and mercy, if any repentance that men can then exerciſe, (which at the beſt muſt needs be very confuſed and imperfect) will then be accepted; if any importunity, which men can then uſe, will be available. For with what face can we expect, that after all the evil actions of a long life, God ſhould be mollified towards us by a few good words, and accept of a forc'd and conſtrained repentance for all our wilful and deliberate crimes, and that he ſhould forgive us all our ſins upon a little importunity, when we can ſin no longer, and will repent no ſooner.

Let us then, by all that hath been ſaid, be effectually perſuaded to mind the buſineſs of religion in good earneſt, and, with all our might, eſpecially the practice of it in the exerciſe of all the graces and virtues of a good life. Let us heartily repent of all the ſins of our paſt life, and reſolve upon a better courſe for the future; and let us not delay and put off this neceſſary work to the moſt unfit and improper time of old age, and ſickneſs, and death: but let us ſet about it preſently, and enter upon a good courſe, and make all the ſpeed and progreſs in it we can.

And let us remember, that whatever we do in religion will not bring us to heaven, if we do not *do the will of our Father which is in heaven*; if we do not give up ourſelves to a conſtant and univerſal obedience to his laws. To *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate:* And tho' we *ſtrive to enter in* a thouſand other ways, *we ſhall not be able*; and after all our confidence and conceit of ourſelves, and our own righteouſneſs, and ſecurity of our ſalvation from the privileges of any church, it will be a ſtrange damp and diſappointment to us, to ſee the ſincere Chriſtians, who have done the will of God, and lived in obedience to his Laws, to come from all quarters and churches in the world, and *ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac,* and *Jacob, in the kingdom of God,* when we, who thought ourſelves *the children of the kingdom ſhall be caſt out,* becauſe we have been *workers of iniquity.* I will conclude all with thoſe plain words of the Apoſtle, *Rom.* ii. 7, 8, 9. *To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory and honour, and immortality*; *eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs*; *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil*; *in the day when God ſhall judge the ſecrets of men by Jeſus Chriſt according to the Goſpel.*

The Firſt Sermon on this Text.

SERMON LXXII.

The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus.*

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of ſores.

I Intend, by God's aſſiſtance, to go over this parable, than which I think there is none in the whole Goſpel, which is more apt to affect men, or which is more artificially contrived, and in the circumſtances whereof a greater *decorum* is obſerved.

It is a great queſtion among interpreters, whether this narration concerning the rich man and *Lazarus* be a parable, or a hiſtory, or a mixture of both. That it is not a hiſtory, the reſemblance between it and others of our Saviour's parables, will eaſily convince any man that is not contentious; beſides that, in ſome ancient copies, 'tis uſher'd in with this preface, *And he ſpake a parable to his diſciples: A certain rich man,* &c.

But yet as ſome of the ancients have not improbably conjectur'd, it ſeems to be ſuch a kind of parable, as had ſomething of a real foundation; as namely, that there was ſuch a poor man as *Lazarus* is here deſcribed, and of that name among the *Jews:* For in a meer parable 'tis altogether unuſual to name perſons, nor is this done in any other of our Saviour's parables.

But whether this be ſo or not, is not worth the diſputing, becauſe it alters not the caſe as to our Saviour's purpoſe, and the inſtructions which we may learn from it.

In the handling of this parable, I ſhall explain it as I go along, and draw *two* ſorts of inſtructions or obſervations from it.

The *firſt* ſort of obſervations ſhall be from the circumſtances which ſerve for the *decorum* of the parable: And theſe I will not warrant to be all intended by our Saviour; but only to be true in themſelves, and uſeful, and to have a probable riſe from ſome circumſtances of the parable; and therefore I ſhall ſpeak but very briefly to them.

The *ſecond* ſort of obſervations ſhall be ſuch as are grounded upon the main ſcope and intent of the parable; and theſe I ſhall inſiſt more largely upon. I begin,

Firſt, With thoſe obſervations and inſtructions which I ſhall gather up from the Circumſtances which ſerve for the *decorum* of the parable; and I ſhall take them in order as they lie in the parable.

Ver. 19. *There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day.* Some think that our Saviour in this deſcription reflected upon *Herod*, becauſe he deſcribes this rich man to be *cloathed in purple*. But this conjecture is without reaſon; for beſides that it was not our Saviour's cuſtom in his preaching, to give ſecret girds to the magiſtrate; 'tis certain that it was long after our Saviour's time, that purple was appropriated to kings: It was then, and a great while after, the wear of rich and powerful men, and of the favourites and great men of the court, who are frequently in ancient hiſtories call'd the *purpurati*, thoſe that wore purple.

That which I obſerve from hence, is, that the rich man is not here cenſured for enjoying what he had, for wearing rich apparel, and keeping a great Table. This of it ſelf, if it be according to a man's eſtate and quality, and without intemperance, is ſo far from being a fault, that it is a commendable virtue. But here was his fault, that he made all to ſerve his own ſenſuality and luxury, without any conſideration of the wants and neceſſities of others: Whereas one of the great uſes of the plentiful tables of rich men, is from the ſuperfluity of them to feed the poor and the hungry.

Ver. 20. *And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus*, as if our Saviour had ſaid, for inſtance, poor *Lazarus* whom ye all knew. And here I cannot but take notice of the *decorum* which our Saviour uſes. He would not name any rich man, becauſe that was invidious, and apt to provoke. He endeavours to make all men ſenſible of their duty; but he would provoke none of them by any peeviſh reflection; for nothing is more improper than to provoke thoſe whom we intend to perſuade. While a man's reaſon is calm and undiſturbed, it is capable of truth fairly propounded; but if we once ſtir up men's paſſions, it is like muddying of the waters, they can diſcern nothing clearly afterwards. But to proceed in the parable.

There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at the rich man's gate full of ſores, and was deſirous to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table, moreover the dogs came and licked his ſores. Here are *three* great aggravations of the rich man's uncharitableneſs:

1ſt, That here was an object preſented it ſelf to him.

2dly, Such an object as would move any one's pity, a man reduc'd to extreme miſery and neceſſity.

3dly, A little relief would have contented him.

1ſt, Here was an object preſented itſelf to him, *Lazarus* laid at the rich man's gate; ſo that ſo often as he went out of his own houſe and came in, he could not but take notice of him. Good men that are charitably diſpoſed, will enquire out objects for their charity, and not always ſtay till they thruſt themſelves upon them: But he is a very bad man, who, when an object of great pity and charity is preſented, is ſo far from relenting towards him, that he ſtops his ear to his cry, and turns away his face from him. He is an uncharitable man, who being rich, and hearing of the miſeries of others, does not take them into conſideration: But what we ſee with our eyes is much more apt to affect us. So that this was an argument of a very cruel diſpoſition in the rich man, that having ſo many occaſions of ſeeing *Lazarus*, he ſhould never be moved to commiſerate him.

2dly, Here was ſuch an object preſented to him, as would move any one's pity, a man reduced to extreme miſery and neceſſity. Here was no common object of charity, a man, not only in extreme want, but in great pain and anguiſh, and ſo helpleſs, that he was unable to keep off the dogs from being troubleſome to him: And yet this did not move him.

3dly, A very little relief would have contented this poor man, and have been a great kindneſs to him; that which the rich man might have ſpared without the leaſt prejudice to himſelf. He would have been glad to have been *fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table*; and yet the parable intimates, that the rich man was ſo hard-hearted, as not to afford him theſe.

Ver. 22. *And it came to paſs that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's boſom.* Here was a great and ſudden change! He, who when he was alive was neglected by men, and contumeliouſly expoſed like a dead carcaſs to the dogs, when he dies is attended on by the angels, and by them ſafely conveyed into a ſtate of unſpeakable happineſs. He who lay at the rich man's gate, and could find no entrance there, is admitted into heaven. *The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's boſom.*

'Tis very obſervable, that our Saviour in this parable repreſents men as paſſing immediately out of this life into a ſtate of happineſs or torment. And as in no other place of Scripture, ſo neither in this, where it had been ſo proper, does our Saviour give the leaſt intimation of the ſtate of *purgatory*, which the church of *Rome* hath deviſed, and makes ſo much profit and advantage of; which becauſe it is ſo viſible and apparent, we may without uncharitableneſs ſuppoſe to be the reaſon why they keep ſuch a ſtir about it.

And was carried by the angels into Abraham's boſom. It was an ancient tradition among the *Jews*, that the angels did attend good men at their death, and carry their ſouls into *paradiſe*, which is here call'd *Abraham's boſom.* And this was a proper place for *Lazarus*, who had been neglected by the rich man; to be convey'd into *Abraham's boſom* who was of a quite contrary temper, and loved to entertain and relieve ſtrangers.

And *paradiſe* is fitly call'd *Abraham's boſom*, becauſe the *Jews* had ſo great a veneration for *Abraham*, and that deſervedly for his eminent faith and obedience, that they gave him the firſt place among the bleſſed. Hence is the expreſſion, *Matth.* viii. 11. of *ſitting down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.* Now this expreſſion of *being in Abraham's boſom*, is an alluſion to the cuſtom of feaſts among the *Jews*, where the moſt eſteemed and beloved gueſt ſat next him that was chief at the feaſt, and leaned on his boſom. Hence St. *John* is call'd the Diſciple whom *Jeſus* loved, becauſe when he ſat at meat, he leaned on his boſom, *John* xiii. 23. Hence likewiſe is the expreſſion of our Saviour's being *in the boſom of his Father*, to ſignify his dearneſs to him, *John* i. 18. *No man hath ſeen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the boſom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

I proceed. *The rich man alſo died, and was buried. The rich man alſo died*; this is very elegant and emphatical, inſinuating to us, what the Scripture ſo often takes notice of; that riches, for all mens confidence in them, will not deliver from death. This rich man indeed was out of danger of being ſtarved and famiſh'd, as poor *Lazarus* was. But death had other ways to come at him. It is probable enough, that he might be ſurfeited by *faring ſumptuouſly every day. The rich man alſo died.*

And was buried. And here again we may obſerve the ſtrict *decorum* which our Saviour uſes in this parable. It is not ſaid of *Lazarus*, that he was buried, but only that *he died*; it is probable, that he was flung out of the way into ſome pit or other: But of the rich man it is ſaid, he was buried. And this is all the advantage which a rich man hath by a great eſtate after he is dead, to have a pompous and ſolemn funeral; which yet ſignifies nothing to him after death, becauſe he is inſenſible of it.

Ver. 23. *And in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom.* As corporal acts are attributed to God in Scripture, ſo likewiſe to ſeparated ſouls.

In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments; intimating to us, that this ſenſual and voluptuous man had ſtupidly paſt away his life, without any ſerious thoughts and conſideration: but now at laſt he was awakened, when it was too late, and began to conſider. *In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.*

O the ſtupidity of ſinners! who run on blindly in their courſe, and never open their eyes 'till they are fallen into the pit; who cannot be brought to conſider, 'till conſideration will do them no good; 'till it ſerve to no other purpoſe, but to enrage their conſciences, and to multiply the ſtings of them.

Thus it was with this rich man, *he lift up his eyes being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom.* Our Saviour repreſents him as ſeeing that which would then moſt propably come to his mind. Feeling his own miſery, he began to conſider the happy condition of the poor man whom he had ſo cruelly neglected. And indeed one great part of the torment of hell conſiſts in thoſe reflections which men ſhall make upon the happineſs which they have wilfully loſt and neglected, and the ſins whereby they have plunged themſelves into that miſerable ſtate.

Ver. 24. *And he cried, and ſaid, father Abraham, have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.* See how the ſcene is changed; now he is fain to beg relief of the beggar who had ſued to him in vain.

Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue. Here is another very decent circumſtance; the rich man is repreſented as not having the face to beg any great relief from *Lazarus*, towards whom he had been ſo hard-hearted. *To dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool his tongue,* had been a very great favour from *Lazarus*, to whom the rich man had denied even the *crumbs which fell from his table.*

For I am tormented in this flame. The Scripture loves to make uſe of ſenſible repreſentations, to ſet forth to us the happineſs and miſery of the next life; partly by way of condeſcenſion to our underſtandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our affections. For whilſt we are in the body, and immers'd in ſenſe, we are moſt apt to be moved by ſuch deſcriptions of things, as are ſenſible; and therefore the torments of wicked men in hell, are uſually in Scripture deſcribed to us, by one of the quickeſt and ſharpeſt pains that human nature is ordinarily acquainted withal, namely, by the pain of burning; fire being the moſt active thing in nature, and therefore capable of cauſing the ſharpeſt pains.

But we cannot from theſe and the like expreſſions of Scripture certainly determine that this is the true and proper pain of hell: All that we can infer from theſe deſcriptions is this, that the ſufferings of wicked men in the other world, ſhall be very terrible, and as great, and probably greater than can poſſibly be deſcribed to us, by any thing that we are now acquainted withal: for who knows the power of God's anger, and the utmoſt of what omnipotent juſtice can do to ſinners? For as the glory of heaven, and the joys of God's preſence are now inconceiveable; ſo likewiſe are the torments of hell, and the miſeries of the damned. *Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have enter'd in the heart of man,* thoſe dreadful things *which God prepares for them that hate him.* Who can imagine the utmoſt ſignificancy of thoſe phraſes which the Scripture uſes to ſet forth this to us, of God's being *a conſuming fire*, of being *tormented in flames*, of God's *wrath and jealouſy ſmoaking* againſt ſinners, and all the curſes that are written in his book, falling upon them? Who can conceive the horror of thoſe expreſſions, of *the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched*; of God's *pouring out the vials of his wrath*, of being *deliver'd over to the tormentor*, of being *thruſt into utter darkneſs*, of being *caſt into the lake of fire and brimſtone?* Theſe forms of ſpeech ſeem to be borrowed from thoſe things which among men are moſt dreadful and affrighting; and to be calculated and accommodated to our capacities, and not ſo much intended to expreſs to us the proper and real torments of hell, as to convey to us in a more ſenſible and affecting manner the ſenſe of what the Scripture ſays in general, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Ver. 25. *But Abraham ſaid, ſon, remember that thou in thy life-time received'ſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Abraham ſaid, ſon, remember.* It is very obſervable, how our Saviour chuſes to repreſent to us the diſcourſe between *Abraham* and the rich man; tho' there was the greateſt difference between them imaginable, the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet they treated one another civilly. *Abraham* is brought in giving the common terms of civility to this wretched wicked man, and calling him *ſon*; *ſon, remember.* It was indeed a very ſevere thing which he ſaid to him; he put him in mind of his former proſperity, and of his fault in his unmerciful uſage of *Lazarus*; *Remember, ſon, that thou in thy life-time received'ſt thy good things, and Lazarus,* &c. But yet whilſt he ſpeaks ſuch ſharp things to him, he bates bad language. A man may ſay very ſevere things, where a juſt occaſion requires it; but he muſt uſe no reviling; *rem ipſam dic, mitte male loqui*, ſay the thing, but uſe no bad language. And this, as one ſays, is the true art of chiding, the proper ſtyle wherein we muſt uſe to reprove. If we do it with malice, and anger, and contempt, it is miſbecoming, even tho' we deſpair of doing good; but if we hope for any good effect, we are like to miſs of it this way, for as the Apoſtle ſays excellently, *the wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God.*

Some think that *Abraham* gives the rich man the title of *ſon* ironically, and by way of jeer: but without all reaſon. For ſurely there is not ſo much bad nature in heaven, as to ſcoff at thoſe who are in miſery. Beſides that, we find our Saviour obſerving this *decorum* of good language in other of his parables; as particularly, in that of the king who invited gueſts to the marriage of his ſon, *Matth.* xxii. 11. When the king ſaw there the man that came without his wedding garment, tho' he paſt a very ſevere ſentence upon him, yet he gives him the common terms of civility; *Friend, how cameſt thou hither?*

This ſhould teach us Chriſtians, how we ought to demean our ſelves towards thoſe who are at the greateſt diſtance from us, and how we ought to behave our ſelves towards one another in the greateſt differences of religion. None ſure can be at greater diſtance than *Abraham* in *paradiſe*, and the rich man in *hell*; and yet our Saviour would not repreſent them as at terms of defiance with one another. One might have expected that *Abraham* ſhould have reviled this poor wretch, and diſdain'd to have ſpoken to him: But this is not the temper of heaven, nor ought it to be of good men upon earth, even towards the worſt of men.

How does this condemn our rudeneſs and impatience with one another, in our religious differences! we think no terms bad enough to uſe towards one another: and yet one of the moſt famous diſputes that we find mentioned in Scripture, and that between the moſt oppoſite parties that can be imagined, was managed after another faſhion; I mean that recorded by St. *Jude* between *Michael* the arch-angel, and the devil, *v.* 9. *Yet Michael the arch-angel, when contending with the devil, he diſputed about the body of Moſes, durſt not bring a railing accuſation*; he durſt not allow himſelf this, no, not in the heat of diſpute, when perſons are moſt apt to fly out into paſſion, becauſe it was indecent, and would have been diſpleaſing to God; this I believe is the true reaſon why it is ſaid, *he durſt not bring a railing accuſation.* And yet I may add another, which is not improper for our conſideration, I am ſure it hath a good moral, the devil would have been too hard for him at railing, he was better ſkill'd at that weapon, and more expert at that kind of diſpute.

Which conſideration may be a good argument to us againſt reviling any man. If we revile the good, we are unjuſt, becauſe they deſerve it not; if we revile the bad, we are unwiſe, becauſe we ſhall get nothing by it. I could almoſt envy the character which was given of one of the *Romans*; *Neſcivit quid eſſet male dicere*; *he knew not what it was to give bad language.*

I proceed. *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time received'ſt thy good things. Thy good things*, thoſe which thou didſt value and eſteem ſo highly, and didſt place thy chief happineſs in, as if there had been no other good to be ſought after. *Thy good things*, and indeed ſo he uſed them, as if he had been the ſole lord and proprietor of them, and they had not been committed to him, as a ſteward, to be diſpenſed for his maſter's uſe, for the cloathing of the naked, and the feeding of the hungry, and the relieving of thoſe in diſtreſs.

Ver. 27, 28. *Then he ſaid, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldſt ſend him to my father's houſe: for I have five brethren; that he may teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo come into this place of torment.* Here the rich man, tho' in hell, is repreſented as retaining ſome tenderneſs for his relations, as ſolicitous leſt they ſhould be involved in the ſame miſery with himſelf. The laſt piece of that which commonly remains in men, is natural affection, which is not ſo much a virtue, as a natural principle, and is common to many brute beaſts. When a man puts off this, we may give him up for loſt to all manner of goodneſs. To be *without natural affection*, is the worſt character can be given of a man. Our Saviour repreſents this rich man in hell as not ſo totally degenerate as to be quite deſtitute of this.

I think ſome attribute this motion of the rich man concerning his brethren to another cauſe; as if he had deſired it, not out of kindneſs to them, but out of regard to himſelf; as being afraid that if his brethren, who probably were corrupted by his example, had periſh'd by that means, it would have been an aggravation of his torments. But this conjecture is too ſubtle, and without any good ground; for every man carries his burden of guilt with him out of this world, and it is not increaſed by any conſequence of our actions here. For the crime of a bad example is the ſame whether men follow it or not, becauſe he that gives bad example to others, does what in him lies to draw them into ſin; and if they do not follow it, that is no mitigation of his fault.

I have but one obſervation more, and that is from the mention of his *brethren* as his neareſt relations, which is a great aggravation of the rich man's uncharitableneſs, becauſe he is repreſented as having no children to take care for, and yet he would not conſider the poor.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, endeavour'd to explain this parable, and have made ſuch obſervations from the circumſtances of it, as may be uſeful for our inſtruction: But as I premiſed at firſt, I will not warrant all theſe obſervations to be certainly intended by our Saviour; I know very well that every circumſtance of a parable is not to be preſt too far, the moral accommodation does chiefly belong to the main ſcope of it, and many circumſtances are only brought in to fill up the parable, and to make handſomer way for that which is moſt material, and principally intended: But ſo long as the obſervations are true and uſeful, and have a fair colour and occaſion from the circumſtances, it is well enough; to be ſure there is no harm done. I proceed to the *ſecond* ſort of obſervations, namely, ſuch as are drawn from the main ſcope and intent of the parable, which I promiſed to ſpeak more largely to; and they are *ſix*, which I ſhall handle in order.

Firſt, I obſerve that uncharitableneſs and unmercifulneſs to the poor, is a great and damning ſin. We find no other fault imputed to the rich man but this, that he took no care out of his ſuperfluity and abundance to relieve this poor man that lay at his gate. He is not charged for want of juſtice, but of charity; not for having got a great eſtate by fraud or oppreſſion, but that in the midſt of this abundance he had no conſideration and pity for thoſe that were in want.

I ſhall endeavour to make out this obſervation by the parts of it.

1ſt, That unmercifulneſs and uncharitableneſs to the poor is a great ſin.

2dly, Such a ſin, as alone and without any other guilt, is ſufficient to ruin a man for ever. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeverally.

1ſt, That unmercifulneſs and uncharitableneſs to the poor is a very great ſin. It contains in its very nature two black crimes, inhumanity and impiety.

1. Inhumanity; it is an argument of a cruel and ſavage diſpoſition, not to pity thoſe that are in want and miſery. And he doth not truly pity the miſeries of others, that doth not relieve them when he hath ability and opportunity in his hands. Tenderneſs and compaſſion for the ſufferings of others, is a virtue ſo proper to our nature, that it is therefore called *humanity*, as if it were eſſential to human nature, and as if without this, we did not deſerve the name of men. To ſee men like ourſelves, *bone of our bone, and fleſh of our fleſh*, labouring under want and neceſſity, and yet not to be moved to commiſerate him, this is a ſign that we have put off our own nature, otherwiſe we ſhould pity the ſufferings of it in others. For whenever we behold a man like ourſelves groaning under want, and preſt with neceſſity, and do not relent towards him, and are nor ready to relieve him, we are hard-hearted to our own nature, and do in ſome ſenſe what the Apoſtle ſays *no man ever did* (that is, none retaining the temper and affections of a man) *hate his own fleſh*.

This the Scripture ſpeaks of as a moſt barbarous ſort of inhumanity, and calls it murder, 1 *John* iii. 15. *Whoſo hateth his brother, is a murderer*; and not to relieve our brother in want, is *to hate* him; for this is the inſtance which the Apoſtle gives at the *17th verſe, whoſo hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother in want, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him*; whoſo doth not conſider the poor, is a man ſlayer and a murderer, he is cruel to his own nature, nay, were he ſufficiently ſenſible of the condition of human nature, he is cruel to himſelf.

Seeſt thou a poor man in great miſery and want, there is nothing hath befallen him but what is common to man, what might have been thy lot and portion as well as his, and what may happen to thee or thine another time. Make it therefore thine own caſe: (for ſo the providence of God may make it one time or other, and thou provokeſt him to make it ſo ſpeedily, by thy unmerciful diſpoſition toward the poor,) I ſay, make it thine own caſe, if thou wert in the poor man's condition, and he in thine, conſult thine own bowels, and tell me how thou wouldſt wiſh him to be affected toward thee. Wouldſt thou be willing that he ſhould ſlight and repulſe thee, and ſhut up his bowels of compaſſion from thee? If not, then do not thou deal ſo with him; conſider that it may be thine own caſe, therefore do not thou give the world any bad example in this kind, do not teach men to be unmerciful, leſt they learn of thee, and thou find the ill effects of it, when it comes to be thine own condition. This is the firſt aggravation of this ſin, the inhumanity of it. But,

2. Beſides the inhumanity of this ſin, it is likewiſe a great impiety toward God. Unmercifulneſs to the poor hath this four-fold impiety in it; it is a contempt of God; an uſurpation upon his right; a ſlighting of his providence; and a plain demonſtration that we do not love God, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and inſincere.

1. It is a contempt of God, and a reproaching of him; ſo *Solomon* tells us, *Prov.* xiv. 31. *He that oppreſſeth the poor*, (not only he that dealeth unjuſtly with a poor man, but he that is uncharitable towards him, as appears by the oppoſition, *but he that honoureth him, hath mercy on the poor*. Here oppreſſion of the poor is oppoſed to want of charity towards him;) *He that oppreſſeth the poor reproacheth his maker*. How is that? He deſpiſeth God who made him after his own image and likeneſs: For the poor man bears the image of God as well as the rich, ſo that thou canſt not oppreſs or neglect him, without ſome reflection upon God, whoſe image he bears.

2. The uncharitable man is an uſurper upon God's right. *The earth is the Lord's and the fulneſs thereof*, and *he hath given it to the children of men*, not abſolutely to diſpoſe of as they pleaſe, but in truſt, and with certain reſervations, ſo as to be accountable to him for the diſpoſal of it. In reſpect of other men, we are indeed true proprietors of our eſtates: but in reſpect of God, we are but ſtewards; and he will call us to an account how we have laid them out. So much as we need is ours; but beyond what will ſupport us, and be a convenient proviſion for our family, in the rank wherein God hath placed us, all that is given to us, that we may give it to others. And if God hath been liberal to us in the bleſſings of this life, it is on purpoſe to give us an opportunity, and to engage us to be ſo to

others that ſtand in need of our charity; and we are falſe to our truſt, if we keep thoſe things to our ſelves, which we receive from God for this very end that we might diſtribute them to others, according to the proportion of our ability and their neceſſity. This is to hide our Lord's talent in a napkin, and that which thou ſtoreſt up in this caſe is unjuſtly detained by thee; for God intended it ſhould have been for bread for the hungry, and for cloaths for the naked, for the relief and ſupport of thoſe who were ready to periſh.

3. The uncharitable man is impious in ſlighting of God's providence. He does not conſider that riches and poverty are of the Lord, that he can ſoon change our condition, and that it is an eaſy thing with him to make a rich man poor. We do not ſufficiently reverence the providence which rules the world, if when God hath bleſt us with plenty and abundance, we have no pity and regard for thoſe that are in need. God can ſoon turn the wheel, and lay thee as low as the poor man whom thou doſt neglect. He can *caſt down the mighty from their ſeat, and exalt the humble and meek; fill the hungry with good things, and ſend the rich empty away.*

God's providence could eaſily have diſpoſed of things otherwiſe, to have ſecured every man from want: but he hath on purpoſe order'd this variety of conditions, high and low, rich and poor, not that ſome men might have an advantage to inſult over and deſpiſe others, but that there might be an opportunity for the exerciſe of ſeveral virtues; that the poor might have an opportunity to exerciſe their dependance upon God, and their patience and ſubmiſſion to his will; and that the rich might ſhew their temperance, and moderation, and charity.

4. Unmercifulneſs to the poor is a plain demonſtration that we do not love God, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical, and inſincere. St. *James* tells us, that *pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and the widow*, Ja. i. 27. That *the wiſdom which is from above is full of mercy and good fruits*, Ch. iii. 17. St. *John* repreſents this uncharitable diſpoſition as utterly inconſiſtent with the true love of God, 1 *John* iii. 17. *But whoſo hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him; how dwelleth the love of God in him?* In vain does ſuch a man pretend to love God; nay, *Ch.* iv. *v.* 20. he tells us that it is impoſſible ſuch a man ſhould love God. *If a man ſay I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath not ſeen?* This deſerves to be ſeriouſly conſider'd by thoſe who make a great ſhew of devotion, and are at great pains in prayer, and faſting, and reading, and hearing the word of God, and in all other frugal exerciſes of religion, which ſtand them in no money; leſt all their labour be loſt for want of this one neceſſary and eſſential part; leſt with the young man in the Goſpel, after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by Chriſt for lack of *this one thing*. I have done with the firſt part of the obſervation, that unmercifulneſs is a very great ſin. I proceed to the

2*d*. That it is ſuch a ſin, as alone, and without any other guilt, is ſufficient to ruin a man for ever. The parable lays the rich man's condemnation upon this; it was the guilt of this ſin that tormented him when he was in hell. The Scripture is full of ſevere threatnings againſt this ſin. *Prov.* xxi. 13. *Whoſo ſtoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he alſo ſhall cry himſelf, but ſhall not be heard.* God will have no regard or pity for the man that regardeth not the poor. That is a terrible text, *Jam.* ii. 13. *He ſhall have judgment without mercy, that hath ſhewed no mercy.*

Our Saviour hath two parables to repreſent to us the danger of this ſin; this here in the text, and that in *Luke* xii. concerning the covetous man that enlarged his barns, and was ſtill laying up, but laid nothing out upon the poor: upon which our Saviour makes this obſervation, which is the moral of the parable, *v.* 21. *So is he that layeth up treaſure for himſelf, and is not rich towards God*; ſo ſhall he be, ſuch an iſſue of his folly may every one expect, who layeth up treaſure for himſelf, but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? The Scripture tells us, by works of mercy and charity; this our Saviour calls *laying up for our ſelves treaſures in heaven*, Matth. vi. 20. And *Luke* xii. 33. he calls giving of alms, *providing for our ſelves bags that wax not old, a treaſure in heaven that faileth not.*

There is no particular grace and virtue to which the promiſe of eternal life is ſo frequently made in Scripture, as to this of mercy and charity to the poor, *Matt.* v. 7. *Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall find mercy.* Which promiſe, as it does not exclude a reward in this world. ſo it ſeems principally to reſpect the mercy of God at the great day, *Luke* xiv. 12, 13, 14. *When thou makeſt a feaſt, invite not the rich, for they will recompence thee again: but invite the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind, for they cannot recompence thee; but thou ſhalt be recompenced at the reſurrection of the juſt*, Luke xvi. 9.

Make therefore to yourſelves friends of the Mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye ſhall fail, they may receive you into everlaſting habitations. 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate, laying up in ſtore for themſelves a good foundation*, as the word θεμέλιος is ſometimes uſed, *a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.*

But the moſt conſiderable text of all other to this purpoſe is in *Matt* xxv. where our Saviour gives us a deſcription of the judgment of the great day: And if that be a true and proper repreſentation of the proceſs of that day, then the grand enquiry will be, what works of charity have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly ſentence ſhall be paſt upon us.

The proper reſult from all this diſcourſe is to perſuade men to this neceſſary duty. Our eternal happineſs does not ſo much depend upon the exerciſe of any one ſingle grace or virtue, as this of charity and mercy. Faith and repentance are more general and fundamental graces, and as it were the parents of all the reſt: But of all ſingle virtues the Scripture lays the greateſt weight upon this of charity; and if we do truly believe the precepts of the Goſpel, and the promiſes and threatnings of it, we cannot but have a principal regard to it.

I know how averſe men generally are to this duty, which make them ſo full of excuſes and objections againſt it.

1. They have children to provide for. This is not the caſe of all, and they whoſe caſe it is, may do well to conſider, that it will not be amiſs to leave a bleſſing as well as an inheritance to their children.

2. They tell us they intend to do ſomething when they die. I doubt that very much; but granting their intention to be real, why ſhould men chuſe to ſpoil a good work, and take away the grace and acceptableneſs of it, by the manner of doing? It ſhews a great backwardneſs to the work, when we defer it as long as we can. He that will not do good till he be forced by the laſt neceſſity, *diu noluit*, was long unwilling. It is one of the worſt compliments we can put upon God, to give a thing to him when we can keep it no longer.

3. Others ſay, they may come to want themſelves, and it is prudence to provide againſt that. To this I anſwer,

(1.) I believe that no man ever came the ſooner to want for his charity. *David* hath an expreſs obſervation to the contrary, *Pſal.* xxxvii. 25. *I have been young and now am old, yet I have not ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread.* And tho' he uſes a general word, yet that by the *righteous* here he intended the *merciful man*, is evident from the next words, *he is ever merciful and lendeth.*

And beſides *David*'s obſervation, we have expreſs promiſes of God to ſecure us againſt this fear, *Pſal.* xl. 1, 2. *Bleſſed is he that conſidereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble, the Lord will preſerve him and keep him alive, and he ſhall be bleſſed upon the earth.* Prov. xxviii. 27. *He that giveth unto the poor ſhall not lack.*

(2.) Thou may'ſt come to want tho' thou give nothing; thou may'ſt loſe that which thou haſt ſpared in this kind as well as the reſt; thou may'ſt loſe all, and then thou art no better ſecured againſt want, than if thou hadſt been charitable. Beſides that, when thou art brought to poverty, thou wilt want the comfort of having done this duty, and may'ſt juſtly look upon the neglect of this duty as one of the cauſes of thy poverty.

(3.) After all our care to provide for ourſelves, we muſt truſt the providence of God; and a man can in no caſe ſo ſafely *commit himſelf to God as in well-doing.* If the providence of God (as we all believe) be peculiarly concerned to bleſs one man more than another, I dare ſay the charitable man will not have the leaſt portion.

(4.) There is a worſe objection than all theſe made by ſome grave men, who would be glad under pretence of piety to ſlip themſelves out of this duty; and that is this, that it ſavours of popery to preſs good works with ſo much earneſtneſs upon men, as if we could merit heaven by them; ſo that they dare not be charitable out of a pious fear, as they pretend, leſt hereby they ſhould entertain the doctrine of merit.

But if the truth were known, I doubt covetouſneſs lies at the bottom of this objection: However it is fit it ſhould be anſwered. And,

(1.) I ſay that no man that is not prejudiced either by his education or intereſt, can think that a creature can merit any thing at the hand of God, to whom all that we can poſſibly do, is antecedently due; much leſs that we can merit ſo great a reward as that of eternal happineſs.

(2.) Tho' we deny the merit of good works, yet we firmly believe the neceſſity of them to eternal life. And that they are neceſſary to eternal life, is as good an argument to perſuade a wiſe man to do them, as if they were meritorious; unleſs a man be ſo vain-glorious as to think heaven not worth the having unleſs he purchaſe it himſelf at a valuable conſideration.

And now let me earneſtly intreat you, as you love God and your own ſouls, not to neglect this duty; leſt you bring yourſelves to the ſame miſerable ſtate with this rich man, to whom the leaſt charity that could be aſked was denied. Our Saviour hath purpoſely left this parable on record, to be a teſtimony and a witneſs to us; leſt we being guilty of the ſame ſin, *ſhould come into the ſame place of torment.*

And if any aſk me according to what proportion of his eſtate he ought to be charitable? I cannot determine that. Only, let no man neglect his duty, becauſe I cannot (and it may be no one elſe can) tell him the exact proportion of his charity to his eſtate. There are ſome duties that are ſtrictly determined, as thoſe of juſtice; but God hath left our charity to be a *free-will offering.* In the proportion of this duty, every one muſt determine himſelf by prudence and the love of God. God hath left this duty undetermined, to try the largeneſs of our hearts towards him; only to encourage us to be *abundant in this grace,* he hath promiſed, that according to the proportion of our charity, ſhall be the degree of our happineſs, 2 *Cor.* ix. 6. *He that ſoweth plentifully, ſhall reap plentifully.* But let us be ſure to do ſomething in this kind; any part of our eſtate rather than none.

I will conclude with that excellent counſel of the ſon of *Syrach,* Eccl. iv. *My ſon defraud not the poor, and make not the needy eyes to wait long; make not a hungry ſoul ſorrowful, neither provoke a man in his diſtreſs; add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed, and defer not to give to him that is in need. Reject not the ſupplication of the afflicted, neither turn away thy face from a poor man; turn not thy eye away from the needy, and give him none occaſion to curſe thee. For if he curſe thee in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, his prayer ſhall be heard of him that made him. Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor, and give him a friendly anſwer with meekneſs. Be as a father to the fatherleſs, and inſtead of a huſband to their mother; ſo ſhalt thou be as the ſon of the moſt high, and he ſhall love thee more than thy mother doth.*

SERMON LXXIII.

The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus.*

LUKE XVI. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of ſores.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

I Proceed to our *ſecond* obſervation, that a man may be poor and miſerable in this world, and yet dear to God. This beggar *Lazarus,* tho' he was ſo much ſlighted, and deſpiſed in his life-time by this great rich man, yet it appeared when he came to die, that he was not neglected by God, for *he gave his angels charge concerning him,* to convey him to happineſs; *v.* 22. *The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's boſom.*

But this truth is not only repreſented to us in a parable, but exemplified in the life of our bleſſed Saviour. Never was any man ſo dear to God as he was, for he was *his only begotten ſon, his beloved ſon, in whom he was well pleaſed:* And yet how poor and mean was his condition in this world: inſomuch that the *Jews* were offended at him, and could not own one that appeared in ſo much meanneſs, for the true Meſſias. He was born of mean parents, and perſecuted as ſoon as he was born; he was deſtitute of wordly accommodations; *The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had neſts; but the ſon of man had not where to lay his head. He was deſpiſed and rejected of men, a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief.*

God could have ſent his Son into the world with majeſty and great glory, and have made all the kings of the earth to have bowed before him, and paid homage to him: but the wiſdom of God choſe rather that he ſhould appear in a poor and humble, in a ſuffering and afflicted condition, to confound the pride of the world, who meaſure the love God by theſe outward things, and think that God hates all thoſe whom he permits to be afflicted.

Now it was not poſſible to give a greater and clearer demonſtration of this truth, that goodneſs and ſuffering may meet together in the ſame perſon, than in the Son of God, *who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleaſed the Lord to bruiſe him, and to put him to grief.*

Afflictions in this world are ſo far from being a ſign of God's hatred, that they are an argument of his love and care; *whom the Lord loveth he chaſteneth, and ſcourgeth every ſon whom he receiveth.* Thoſe he deſigns for great things hereafter he trains up by great hardſhips in this world, and by many tribulations prepares them for a kingdom. This courſe God took more eſpecially in the firſt planting of Chriſtianity; the *poor* chiefly were thoſe that *received the Goſpel. Not many mighty, nor many noble; but the baſe things of the world, and the things that were deſpiſed, did God chuſe. Hearken, my beloved brethren,* ſaith St. *James*, ch. ii. 5. *Hath not God choſen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promiſed to them that love him?*

Now this conſideration ſhould perſuade to patience under the greateſt ſufferings and afflictions in this world. God may be our Father, and chaſten us ſeverely; nay, this very thing is rather an argument that he is ſo. God may love us, tho' the world hate us. 'Tis but exerciſing a little patience, and theſe ſtorms will blow over, and we ſhall be removed into a calmer region, where *all tears ſhall be wiped from our eyes; and death and ſorrow ſhall be no more.* This was the portion of the Son of God here; but *it is a faithful ſaying, that if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him; if we ſuffer with him, we ſhall alſo reign with him.* Therefore thoſe who ſuffer in this world ought not to be moved, *as tho' ſome ſtrange thing happened unto them; but they ſhould rather rejoice, in as much as they are partakers of Chriſt's ſufferings, that when his glory ſhall be revealed, they alſo may be glad with exceeding joy,* 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. I proceed to a

Third obſervation, which is the different eſtate of good and bad men after this life; *Lazarus died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's boſom: the rich man died, and went to hell.* This the juſtice of divine providence ſeems to require; ſo that if there had been no revelation of God to this purpoſe, it is a thing very credible to natural reaſon, whether we conſider God or our ſelves. If we conſider God, our reaſon tells us, that he is the holy and righteous governor of the world, and conſequently, that he loves goodneſs, and hates ſin; and therefore is concern'd to countenance the one, and diſcountenance the other, in ſuch a ſolemn and publick manner, as may vindicate his holineſs and juſtice to the world. Now the diſpenſations of his providence are promiſcuous in this world; and therefore it ſeems very reaſonable, that there ſhould be a general aſſize, a fair and open trial; when *God will render to every man according to his works.*

And if we conſider our ſelves, this will appear very credible; for this has been the conſtant opinion, not only of the common people, but of the wiſeſt perſons, who had only the light of nature to guide them. Nay, if we do but ſearch our own conſciences, we ſhall find an inward and ſecret acknowledgment of this, in that inward peace and ſatisfaction we find in any good action, and in that ſhame, and fear, and horror, that haunts a man after the commiſſion of any, tho' never ſo ſecret a ſin.

And as reaſon and Scripture together do aſſure us of a future judgment; ſo likewiſe, that men, when they paſs out of this world, ſhall meet with the proper conſequences and rewards of their actions in the other. And tho' the happineſs or miſery of men be not ſo compleat as it ſhall be after the publick judgment; yet it is unſpeakably great. *Lazarus* is repreſented as very happy immediately after his paſſing out of this world; he is ſaid to be *carried into Abraham boſom:* by which the *Jews* expreſs the happineſs of the future ſtate. And the rich man is repreſented, as in great anguiſh and *torment.* But what the happineſs of good men, and the miſery of wicked men ſhall be in the other ſtate, we can but now imperfectly and unſkilfully deſcribe. Each of theſe I have in another diſcourſe ſpoken ſomething to. I proceed to a

Sermon on Rom. vi. 21, 22.

Fourth obſervation, the vaſt difference between mens conditions in this world, and the other. The rich man proſpered here, and was afterwards tormented: *Lazarus* was poor and miſerable in this world, and happy in the other; *v.* 25. *Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedſt thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* And it is very agreeable to the wiſdom of God, to make ſuch a difference between mens conditions in this world and the other; and that for theſe *two* reaſons.

1ſt, For the trying of mens virtue.

2dly, In order to the recompenſing of it.

1. For the tryal of mens virtue. For this end principally God ordains the ſufferings of good men, and permits the beſt of his ſervants many times to be involved in the greateſt calamities,

lamities, to try their faith in him, and love to him; to improve their virtue, and to prevent thoſe ſins into which the mighty temptations of a perpetual proſperity are apt to draw even the beſt of men; to take off their affections from the love of this vain world, and to engage and fix them there, where they ſhall never repent that they have placed them; to prove their ſincerity towards God, and to exerciſe their patience and ſubmiſſion to his will; to prepare them for the glory of the next life, and to make the happineſs of heaven more welcome to them, when they ſhall come to it.

2dly, In order to the recompenſing of men: that they who will take up with the pleaſures and enjoyments of this preſent world, and take no care for their future ſtate; that they who will gratify their ſenſes, and neglect their immortal ſouls, may inherit the proper conſequences of their wretched choice. And on the other hand, they who love God above all things, and had rather endure the greateſt evils, than do the leaſt; that they who look beyond the preſent ſcene of things, and believe the reality and eternity of the other ſtate, and live accordingly, may not be diſappointed in their hopes, and ſerve God and ſuffer for him for nothing. From this conſideration of the difference between the condition of men in this world and the other, we may infer,

1. That no man ſhould meaſure his felicity or unhappineſs by his lot in this world. If thou receiveſt thy good things, art rich and honourable, and haſt as much of the things of this world as thine heart can wiſh, art ſplendidly attired, and *fareſt ſumptuouſly every day*; *art in no trouble like other men, neither art plagued like other folk*; do not upon this bleſs thy ſelf as the happy man. On the other hand, art thou poor and miſerable, deſtitute of all the conveniences and accommodations of this life; do not repine at thy lot, and murmur at God for having dealt hardly with thee. No man can be pronounced happy or miſerable for what befals him in this life; *no man knows love or hatred by theſe things*; this is but a ſhort and inconſiderable duration, and it matters not much what entertainment we meet withal, as we are paſſing through this world: The ſtate of eternity is that wherein the happineſs or miſery of man ſhall be determined. He is the happy man who is ſo in that life which ſhall never have an end; and he is miſerable that ſhall be ſo for ever.

2. We ſhould not ſet too great a value upon the bleſſings of this life. We may *receive our good things* here, and *be tormented* hereafter; nay, this very thing will be no inconſiderable part of our torment, none of the leaſt aggravations of our miſery, that we *did receive our good things.* Nothing afflicts a man more, and toucheth him more ſenſibly when he is in miſery, than the remembrance of his former proſperity; had he never been happy, his miſery would be the leſs.

Therefore we ſhould be ſo far from applauding ourſelves in the proſperity of this world, that we ſhould rather be afraid of *receiving our good things* here; leſt God ſhould put us off with theſe things, and this ſhould be all our portion, and leſt our miſery in the next world be the greater for our having been happy.

The felicities of this world are tranſient, and tho' our happineſs were never ſo compleat, yet it is going off, and paſſing away; and when it is gone and paſt, if miſery ſucceed it, it had better never have been. *Remember, thou in thy life-time receivedſt thy good things*; theſe things are only for our *life-time*, and how ſhort is that! Did men ſeriouſly conſider this, they would not ſet ſuch a price upon any of the tranſient enjoyments of this life, as for the ſake of them to neglect the great concernments of another world. We are apt to be dazzled with the preſent glittering of worldly glory and proſperity: But if we would look upon theſe things as they will be ſhortly gone from us, how little would they ſignify! the rich man here in the parable did, no doubt, think himſelf a much happier man than poor *Lazarus* that lay at his door; and yet after a little while how glad would he have been to have changed conditions with this poor man! when he was *in torments*, then no doubt he wiſh'd that he had ſuffer'd all the miſery and want in this world, which *Lazarus* did, provided he might have been *comforted* as he was, and *carried by angels into Abraham's boſom.* We ſhould value this world, and look upon it, as this rich man did, not when he enjoy'd it, but when he was taken from it; and we ſhould eſteem it, and uſe it while we may, as he wiſht he had done when it was too late.

3. We ſhould not be exceſſively troubled if we meet with hardſhip and affliction here in this world; becauſe thoſe whom God deſigns for the greateſt happineſs hereafter, may receive *evil things* here. Thus our bleſſed Saviour, *the captain of our ſalvation, was made perfect through ſufferings:* this was the method which God uſed towards his own Son, firſt *he ſuffered, and then enter'd into glory.* He ſuffered more than any of us can bear; and yet he ſupported himſelf under all his ſufferings by the conſideration of the glory that would follow; *for the joy that was ſet before him, he endured the croſs, and deſpiſed the ſhame.*

The ſame conſideration ſhould arm us with patience and conſtancy under the greateſt evils of this life. The evils that we lie under are paſſing and going off; but the happineſs is to come. And if the happineſs of the next world were no greater, nor of longer continuance, than the miſeries of this world; or if they did equally anſwer one another; yet a wiſe man would chuſe to have miſery firſt, and his happineſs laſt. For if his happineſs were firſt, all the pleaſure and comfort of it would be eaten out by diſmal apprehenſions of what was to follow: but his ſufferings, if they were firſt, would be ſweeten'd by the conſideration of his future happineſs, and the bitterneſs of his ſufferings would give a quicker reliſh to his happineſs when it ſhould come, and make it greater.

But a good man under the ſufferings of this life, hath not only this comfort, that his happineſs is to come, but likewiſe that it ſhall be infinitely greater than his ſufferings; that theſe are but ſhort, but that ſhall never have an end. And this was that which fortified the firſt Chriſtians againſt all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do againſt them. They thought themſelves well paid, if *through many tribulations they might* at laſt *enter into the kingdom of God*; becauſe they believed that the joys of the next life would abundantly recompence all their labours and ſufferings in this world. They expected a mighty reward, far beyond all their ſufferings; they were firmly perſuaded that they ſhould be vaſt gainers at the laſt. So the Apoſtle tells us of himſelf, *Rom.* viii. 18. *I reckon that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed.* And to the ſame purpoſe, 2 *Cor.* iv. 17, 18. *Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal weight of glory, whilſt we look not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are eternal.* If we would conſider all things together, and fix our eyes as much upon the happineſs and glory of the next world, as upon the pomp and ſplendor of this; if we would look as much at *the things which are not ſeen,* as *the things which are ſeen,* we ſhould eaſily perceive, that he who ſuffers in this world does not renounce his happineſs, only puts it out to intereſt, upon terms of the greateſt advantage.

4. We ſhould do all things with a regard to our future and eternal ſtate. It matters not much what our condition is in this world, becauſe that's to continue but for a little while: but we ought to have a great and ſerious regard to that ſtate that never ſhall have an end. Therefore whenever we are doing any thing, we ſhould conſider what influence ſuch an action will have upon the happineſs or miſery of the next life. We ſhould meaſure every action and every condition of our lives by the reference of them to eternity. To be rich and great in this world will contribute nothing to our future happineſs; all theſe things which we ſo much doat upon, and purſue with ſo much eagerneſs, will not commend any man to God; they will ſignify nothing when we come to appear before our judge. Death will ſtrip us of theſe things, and in the other world, the ſoul of the pooreſt man that ever lived ſhall be upon equal terms with the richeſt. Nothing but holineſs and virtue will then avail us; and it is but a little while and we ſhall all certainly be of this mind, that the beſt thing men can do in this world, is to provide for the other. I proceed to a

Fifth obſervation, that the ſtate of men in the next world is fixt and unchageable; which I ground upon, *v.* 26. *Between us and you there is a great gulf fixt, ſo that they that would paſs from hence to you cannot, neither can they paſs to us that would come from thence.* By which words our Saviour ſeems not only to intend, that they that are in heaven and hell can have no communication and intercourſe with one another; but likewiſe that they are lodg'd in an immutable ſtate. Thoſe that are happy are like to continue ſo; and thoſe that are miſerable are immutably fixt in that ſtate.

1. As to thoſe that are in happineſs there can be no great doubt. For what can tempt men that have ſo narrowly eſcap'd the dangers and temptations of a wicked world, and are poſſeſt of ſo great a happineſs by the free grace and mercy of God, to do any thing whereby they may forfeit their happineſs; or ſo much as to entertain a thought of offending that God, to whom they cannot but be ſenſible how infinitely they are obliged? In this imperfect ſtate few men have ſo little goodneſs as to ſin without temptation, but in that ſtate where men are perfectly good, and can have no temptation to be otherwiſe, it is not imaginable that they ſhould fall from that ſtate.

2. As to the ſtate of the damned, that *that* likewiſe is immutable the Scripture does ſeem plainly enough to aſſert, when it calls it *an everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord,* and uſes ſuch expreſſions to ſet forth the continuance of their miſery, as ſignify the longeſt and moſt interminable duration, expreſſions of as great an extent as thoſe which are uſed to ſignify the eternal happineſs of the bleſſed; and as large and unlimited, as any are to be had in thoſe languages wherein the Scriptures are written.

Beſides that wicked men in the other world are in Scripture repreſented as in the ſame condition with the devils, of whom there is no ground to believe that any of them ever did or will repent. Not becauſe repentance is impoſſible in its own nature to thoſe that are in extreme miſery; but becauſe there is no place left for it. Being under an irreverſible doom, there is no encouragement to repentance, no hope of mercy and pardon, without which repentance is impoſſible. For if a man did utterly deſpair of pardon, and were aſſured upon good ground, that God would never ſhew mercy to him, in this caſe a man would grow deſperate, and not care what he did. He that knows that whatever he does, he is miſerable and undone, will not matter how he demeans himſelf. All motives to repentance are gone after a man once knows it will be to no purpoſe. And this the ſcripture ſeems to repreſent to us, as the caſe of the devils and damned ſpirits. Becauſe their ſtate is finally determined, and they are concluded under an irreverſible ſentence, therefore repentance is impoſſible to them.

Sorry, no doubt, they are, and heartily troubled that by their own ſin and folly they have brought this miſery upon themſelves, and they cannot but conceive an everlaſting diſpleaſure againſt themſelves, for having been the cauſe and authors of their own ruin; and the reflection of this will be a perpetual ſpring of diſcontent, and fill their minds with eternal rage and vexation; and ſo long as they feel the intolerable puniſhmenrs of ſin, and groan under the inſupportable torments of it, and ſee no end of this miſerable ſtate, no hope of getting out of it, they can be no otherwiſe affected, than with diſcontent at themſelves, and rage and fury againſt God.

They are indeed penitent ſo far, as to be troubled at themſelves for what they have done; but this trouble works no change and alteration in them; they ſtill hate God who inflicts theſe puniſhments upon them, and who they believe is determined to continue them in this miſerable ſtate. The preſent anguiſh of their condition, and their deſpair of bettering it, makes them mad; and their minds are ſo diſtracted by the wildneſs of their paſſions, and their ſpirits ſo exaſperated and ſet on fire by their own giddy motions, that there can be no reſt and ſilence in their ſouls, not ſo much the liberty of one calm and ſedate thought.

Or if at any time they reflect upon the evil of their ſins, and ſhould entertain any thoughts of returning to God and their duty, they are preſently checkt with this conſideration, that their caſe is determined, that God is implacably offended with them, and is inexorably and peremptorily reſolved to make them miſerable for ever; and during this perſuaſion, no man can return to the love of God and goodneſs, without which there can be no repentance.

This conſideration, of the immutable ſtate of men after this life, ſhould engage us with all ſeriouſneſs and diligence to endeavour to ſecure our future happineſs. God hath *ſet before us good and evil, life and death*, and we may yet *chuſe* which we pleaſe; but in the other world, we muſt ſtand to that choice which we have made here, and inherit the conſequences of it.

By ſin mankind is brought into a miſerable ſtate; but our condition is not deſperate and paſt remedy. God hath ſent his Son *to be a prince and a ſaviour, to give repentance and remiſſion of ſins.* So that tho' our caſe be bad, it need not continue ſo, if it be not our own fault. There is a poſſibility now of changing our condition for the better, and of laying the foundation of a perpetual happineſs for ourſelves. The grace of God calls upon us, and is ready to aſſiſt us; ſo that no man's caſe is ſo bad, but there is a poſſibility of bettering it, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, and will make uſe of the grace which God offers, who is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men. Under the influence and aſſiſtance of this grace, thoſe who are *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, may *paſs from death to life*, may be *turned from darkneſs to light*, and *from the power of Satan unto God.* So long as we are in this world there is a poſſibility of being tranſlated from one ſtate to another, from the *dominion of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son.* But if we neglect the opportunities of this life, and ſtand out againſt the offers of God's grace and mercy, there will no overtures be made to us in the other world. After this life is ended, God will try us no more; our final miſcarriage in this world will prove fatal to us in the other, and we ſhall not be permitted to live over again to correct our errors. *As the tree falls ſo it ſhall lye*; ſuch a ſtate as we are ſettled in, when we go out of this world, ſhall be fixt in the other, and there will be no poſſibility of changing it. We are yet *in the hand of our own counſel*, and by God's grace we may mould and faſhion our own fortune. But if we trifle away this advantage, we ſhall *fall into the hands of the living God*, out of which there is no redemption. God hath yet left heaven and hell to our choice, and we had need to look about us; and chuſe well, who can chuſe but once for all and for ever. There is yet a ſpace and opportunity left us of repentance; but ſo ſoon as we ſtep out of this life, and are entered upon the other world, our condition will be ſealed, never to be revers'd. And becauſe after this life there will be no further hopes of mercy, there will be no poſſibility of repentance. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of ſalvation; therefore to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; leſt God ſwear in his wrath that ye ſhall not enter into his reſt.* I proceed to a

Sixth obſervation, that a ſtanding revelation of God is evidence ſufficient for divine things. *They have Moſes and the Prophets, let them hear them*; that is, they have the books of *Moſes* and the Prophets, written by men divinely inſpired, theſe do ſufficiently declare to them the will of God, and their duty; and it is unreaſonable to demand or expect that God ſhould do more for their conviction and ſatisfaction.

I know very well the text ſpeaks only of the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament, thoſe of the New being not then extant when this parable was delivered. But what is here ſaid concerning the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament, is equally applicable to the New; and tho' *Abraham* do only recommend *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, there is no doubt but he would have ſaid the ſame concerning *Chriſt* and *his Apoſtles*, if the books of the New Teſtament had been then extant. So that what I ſhall ſay upon this obſervation, does indifferently concern the whole Scripture.

And that I may make out this obſervation more fully, I ſhall take theſe *five* things into conſideration.

1ſt, What we are to underſtand by a divine revelation.

2dly, Give a brief account of the ſeveral kinds of it.

3dly, Shew what advantage this ſtanding revelation of the Scriptures hath above any other way of conveying the will of God to the world.

4thly, That there is ſufficient evidence for the divinity of the Scriptures.

5thly, That it is unreaſonable to expect that God ſhould do more for our conviction, than to afford ſuch a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will. I ſhall go over theſe as briefly as I can. I begin with the

1ſt. What we are to underſtand by a divine revelation. By a divine revelation we are to underſtand a *ſupernatural diſcovery, or manifeſtation of any thing to us*; I ſay *ſupernatural*, becauſe it may either be immediately by God, or by the mediation of Angels, as moſt, if not all the revelations of the Old Teſtament were. *A ſupernatural diſcovery or manifeſtation*, either immediately to our minds, by our underſtandings and inward faculties; (for I do not ſo well underſtand the diſtinction between underſtanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it,) or elſe mediately to our underſtandings by the mediation of our outward ſenſes, as by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and ſound to the ſenſe of hearing: *A diſcovery or manifeſtation of a thing*, whether it be ſuch as cannot be known at all by the uſe of our natural reaſon and underſtandings; or ſuch as may be diſcovered by natural light, but is more clearly revealed or made known, or we are awakened to a more particular and attentive conſideration of it. For it is not at all unſuitable to the wiſdom of God to make a *ſupernatural diſcovery* to us of ſuch things as may be known by the light of nature, either to give us a clearer manifeſtation of ſuch truths as were more obſcurely known, and did as it were lie buried in our underſtandings; or elſe to quicken our minds to a more ſerious and lively conſideration of thoſe truths.

2dly, For the ſeveral kinds of divine revelations. That they were various, the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *ch.* i. 1. *God who at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake to the fathers by the Prophets*; where by *Prophets* we are to underſtand not only thoſe who did fortel future things, but any perſon that was divinely inſpired, and to whom God was pleaſed to make any ſupernatural diſcovery of himſelf.

Now the ſeveral kinds of revelation taken notice of by the *Jews*, are viſions; dreams; prophecy; oracle; inſpiration, or that which they call the holy Ghoſt; voice *Bath-col*; or that which was the higheſt of all, which they call *gradus Moſaicus*, the degree of revelation which was peculiar to *Moſes*. The *Jewiſh* writers, eſpecially *Maimonides*, have many ſubtle obſervations about the differences of theſe ſeveral kinds of revelation, which depend upon ſubtle and philoſophical diſtinctions of the faculties of perception; as that ſome of theſe revelations were by impreſſion only upon the underſtanding; ſome only upon the imagination; ſome upon both; ſome upon the outward ſenſes; but the ſimple and plain difference between them, ſo far as there is any ground in Scripture to diſtinguiſh them, ſeems to be this; viſion was a repreſentation of ſomething to a man when he was waking, in oppoſition to dreams, which were repreſentations made to men in their ſleep. Prophecy might be either dream or viſion; and the *Jews* obſerve, that it was always one of theſe two ways, which they grounded upon *Numb.* xii. 6. *If there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make myſelf known to him in a viſion, and will ſpeak unto him* *in a dream.* But prophecy in the ſtrict notion of it, had this peculiarly belonging to it, that it was not only monitory or inſtructive, but did foretel ſome event of concernment to others; and the *Jewiſh* doctors tell us, that it was a clearer revelation, and carried a greater aſſurance along with it, and that this was common to all the three, that there was ſomething of extaſy and tranſport of mind in all theſe.

The fourth ſort of revelation, which was by oracle, which is called *Urim* and *Thummim*, was a rendering of anſwers to queſtions, by the High-prieſt looking upon the ſtones in the breaſt-plate; which how it was done, is uncertain.

The fifth ſort of revelation is that which they call the holy Ghoſt, which was a more calm and gentle inſpiration, without any extraordinary tranſport of mind or extaſy; ſuch as *David* had in the writing of the *Pſalms*.

The loweſt of all was that which they called *Bath-col*, which was by a voice from heaven; and this is the way of revelation, which the *Jews* obſerved, did only continue among them from the days of the Prophet *Malachi* to our Saviour.

The higheſt of all was that which they called *gradus Moſaicus*, to which the *Jews* give ſeveral prerogatives above all the other ways of revelation; as that it was done by impreſſion merely upon the underſtanding, without extaſy, or rapture, or tranſport, when he was waking, and in his ordinary temper, and his ſenſes not bound up either by extaſy or ſleep; that it was a revelation immediately from God himſelf, and not by the mediation of Angels, without any fear, or amazement, or fainting, which was incident to other Prophets; and the ſpirit of prophecy reſted upon him, and he could exert it arbitrarily, and put it forth when he would. Of which thus much is evidently true from the ſtory of him, that the ſpirit of prophecy did reſt more conſtantly upon him, and that he could exert it with greater freedom, and without any diſcernable amazement or tranſport from his ordinary temper. But that it was by impreſſion merely upon his underſtanding, as that is a diſtinct faculty from the imagination, is not ſo certain: that it was always by an immediate communication from God, without the mediation of Angels, ſeems not to be true; for St. *Stephen* tells us, that *the law was given by the diſpoſition of angels*, Acts vii. 53. And St. *Paul*, that it was *ordained by the Angels in the hand of a mediator*, that is, *Moſes*, *Gal.* iii. 19. But that the revelation which was made to him, had ſome ſingular prerogatives above thoſe of other Prophets, is plain from Scripture, *Numb.* xii. 5, 6, 7, 8. when *Aaron* and *Miriam* contended with *Moſes* as being equal to him, God tells them that there was a vaſt difference between him and other Prophets; *Hear now my words, if there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make myſelf known unto him in a viſion, and will ſpeak unto him in a dream. My ſervant Moſes is not ſo—With him will I ſpeak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark ſpeeches*, &c. Exod. xxxiii. 11. *And the Lord ſpake unto Moſes face to face, as a man ſpeaketh unto his friend*, Deut xxxiv. 10. *And there aroſe not a Prophet ſince in Iſrael like unto Moſes, whom the Lord knew face to face.* All which ſignify at leaſt this, that God made the cleareſt, and moſt familiar, and moſt perfect diſcoveries to *Moſes* of any of the Prophets; only our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by whom God hath diſcovered his will to us under the New Teſtament, did excel *Moſes*; *Moſes* being but *a faithful ſervant*, that is, *humilis amicus*, a meaner ſort of friend; but *the Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, *the only begotten Son of God*, who came from *the boſom of his Father*, and was intimately acquainted with the ſecrets of his will, and *had not the ſpirit given him by meaſure*, but the moſt plentiful effuſion of it, being *anointed above his fellows*.

Now theſe being the ſeveral ſorts and degrees of revelation, which God hath made of himſelf to the world, the holy ſcriptures are a ſyſtem or collection of theſe, the authentick inſtrument or record, by which the things revealed any of theſe ways, are tranſmitted to us, and is therefore called *the word of God*, as containing thoſe things which God in ſeveral ages hath ſpoken to the world; that is, matters of divine revelation, which are neceſſary to be known by men, in order to their eternal happineſs. And this being now the great and ſtanding revelation of God, which is to continue to the end of the world, I intend to limit my diſcourſe ſolely to this, as being the only revelation which we are concerned to enquire after.

And therefore in the *third* place, to ſhew you what advantages this ſtanding revelation of the Scriptures hath above private revelations made to particular perſons, and frequently repeated and renewed in ſeveral ages; that ſo it may appear both agreeable to the wiſdom of God to ſettle revelations in this way, as being more commodious; and likewiſe to his goodneſs, it being a real privilege which theſe latter ages of the world enjoy, that they have a more fixt and certain way of being acquainted with the will of God, than thoſe ages had, which were govern'd by ſuch private revelations, as were now and then made to particular perſons: and the advantages are theſe:

1. It is a more certain way of conveyance of things, and more ſecure and free from impoſture. Suppoſe a revelation made to a particular perſon, which is of general concernment; that this may have a general and laſting effect, he muſt impart it to others, as many as he can, and give them the beſt aſſurance he can of it; and theſe muſt relate it to others; and ſo it muſt paſs from hand to hand, to be delivered from parents to their children. Now this way of conveying a revelation by oral report muſt needs be liable to many uncertainties, both by involuntary miſtakes, through weakneſs of memory or underſtanding, and wilful falſifications and impoſtures, out of malice and deſign. So that the effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be large nor laſting; it can but reach a few perſons, and continue a little while in its full credibility; and the further it goes, the weaker, like circles made in water, which the more they enlarge themſelves, and the longer they continue, the leſs diſcernible they are, till at length they quite diſappear. Whereas being once recorded by perſons ſecured from error, by ſupernatural and divine aſſiſtance, they are not liable to thoſe eaſy falſifications or miſtakes, which traditional reports and relations are neceſſarily, through human malice or weakneſs, liable to.

2. It is a more general and univerſal way of conveyance; which is evident from the common experience of the world, who have pitched upon this way of writing things in books, as that which doth moſt eaſily convey the knowledge and notice of things to the generality of men.

3. It is a more uniform way of conveyance; that is, things that are once written and propogated that way, lye equally open to all, and come in a manner with equal credit to all; it being not morally poſſible that a common book, that paſſeth through all hands, and which is of vaſt importance and concernment, ſhould be liable to any material corruption, without a general conſpiracy and agreement; which cannot be, but that it muſt be generally known. So that conſidering the commonneſs, and univerſal concernment of this book of the Scriptures, all men are in a manner equally, that is, every man is ſufficiently and competently aſſur'd of the credit of it; that is, that we are not in any material thing impoſed upon by falſe copies. But in traditional revelation it is quite otherwiſe; tradition being a very unequal an ununiform way of conveyance. For ſeeing it may be of general concernment, and all cannot have it at the firſt hand, that is, immediately from him to whom it was made, but ſome at the ſecond, others at the third, fourth, or fifth hand, or much further off; the credit of it will be neceſſarily weaken'd by every remove. A report that comes through many hands, being like the argument we call *induction*; and as the ſtrength and goodneſs of that depends upon the truth of every one of thoſe inſtances that make it up, ſo that if any of them fail, the whole argument is naught; ſo the credit of a report that paſſeth through twenty hands, depends upon the integrity and ſufficiency of all the relators; and whatever there is either of falſhood and malice, or of incapacity of underſtanding, or frailty of memory in any of the relators, ſo much of weakneſs is derived into the report or teſtimony; and conſequently the aſſurance which we can have of a private revelation, which is deliver'd traditionally through a great many perſons, muſt needs be very unequal.

4. It is a more laſting way of conveyance. Which likewiſe appears by experience, we having now nothing at all of the hiſtory of ancient times, but what is conveyed down to us in writing.

5. It is a more human way of conveyance, which requires leſs of miracle and ſupernatural interpoſition for the preſervation of it. This book of the Scriptures may with ordinary human care be tranſmitted entire, and free from any material error, to all ſucceeding ages: But revelations unwritten, if they have any laſting and conſiderable effect, they muſt at leaſt in every age be renewed and repeated; otherwiſe in a very ſhort ſpace, either through the unfaithfulneſs, or careleſſneſs and frailty of men, they will either be quite loſt, or ſo corrupted and depraved, that they will ſignify nothing.

From all which it appears, that we have ſo little cauſe to murmur and repine at the providence of God, which in theſe latter ages of the world does not make thoſe more immediate diſcoveries and manifeſtations of himſelf to us, that he did to former ages; that we have rather great reaſon to admire the wiſdom and goodneſs of God's providence, which hath privileged us with this ſtanding revelation of his *written word*, which hath ſo many ways the advantage of frequent and extraordinary revelation, and in reſpect of the generality of mankind, is much more uſeful and effectual to its end. I know there are ſome that have endeavour'd to perſuade the world, that doctrines may much better be preſerved by common rumour and report, than by writing and record; but I hope there is no man ſo deſtitute of common ſenſe as to believe them, contrary to the experience of all men.

I come now to the *fourth* thing I propos'd to be conſider'd; namely, that there is ſufficient evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures. By the divinity of the Scriptures, I mean, that they were revealed by God, and that the things contained in them were not invented by men, but diſcovered to men by God; and that the pen-men of theſe books did not write their own private conceptions, but were inſpired by the holy Ghoſt. Now if we can be ſatisfy'd of this, we ought to receive the Scriptures with the ſame reverence, as if an angel from heaven ſhould declare theſe things unto us, or as if God ſhould immediately reveal them to our minds; for nothing can come with greater authority than this, that we believe it to be revealed by God; and provided we be aſſured of this, it matters not which way; the thing hath the ſame authority.

Now that we have ſufficient evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures, will beſt appear, by conſidering what is ſufficient to give authority to a book, ſo that no prudent or reaſonable man can queſtion, but that the book was writ by him whoſe name it bears. For what evidence we would accept of for the authority of other books, we muſt not refuſe in this caſe for the Scriptures; if we do, we deal unequally, and it is a ſign that we do not want evidence for the authority of the Scriptures, but that we have no mind to believe them.

Now the utmoſt authority that any book is capable of, is, that it hath been tranſmitted down to us by the general and uncontroll'd teſtimony of all Ages, and that the authority of it was never queſtioned in that age wherein it was written, nor invalidated ever ſince.

And this evidence we have for the authority of the Scriptures. As for the Old Teſtament, I ſhall not now labour in the proof of that by arguments proper to it ſelf, but ſhall take the divinity of them upon the authority of the New; which if it be proved, is ſufficient evidence for it, tho' there were no other.

Now for the Scriptures of the New Teſtament, I deſire but theſe *two* things to be granted to me at firſt:

1. That all were written by thoſe perſons whoſe names they bear: and for this we have as much authority as for any books in the world, and ſo much as may ſatisfy men in other caſes, and therefore not to be rejected in this.

2. That thoſe who wrote thoſe books were men of integrity, and did not wilfully falſify in any thing; and this cannot reaſonably be denied, becauſe theſe very perſons gave the utmoſt evidence that men could give of their integrity. The higheſt atteſtation that any man can give of the truth of what he relates, is to lay down his life for the teſtimony of it; and this the Apoſtles did.

Now if this be granted, that they did not falſify in their relations concerning the miracles of Chriſt, and his reſurrection, and the miraculous gifts which were beſtowed upon the Apoſtles after his aſcenſion; this is as great an evidence as the world can give, and as the thing is capable of, that our Saviour was *a teacher come from God*, and that the Apoſtles were extraordinarily aſſiſted by the holy Ghoſt; and if this be granted, what can be deſired more to prove the divinity of their writings?

But it may be ſaid, that tho' the Apoſtles were granted to be men of integrity, and that they did not wilfully falſify in their relations, yet they might be miſtaken about thoſe matters: But that they were not, we have as much evidence as can be for any thing of this nature, namely, that the things which are related are plain ſenſible matters of fact, about which no man need miſtake, unleſs he will; and they did not write things upon the report of others, who might poſſibly have deſigns to deceive, but upon the ſureſt evidence in the world, their own knowledge, and the teſtimony of their ſenſes; *the things that we have ſeen and heard, teſtify we unto you.* So that if they were miſtaken in theſe things, no man can be ſure of any thing; and by the ſame reaſon that we disbelieve the authority of the Scriptures upon this account, we muſt believe nothing at all. This is in ſhort the whole force of the argument for the divinity of the Scriptures, which I might have enlarged infinitely upon; but I deſign now only briefly to repreſent to you, that we, who live at the diſtance of ſo many ages from the time of this revelation, are not deſtitute of ſufficient evidence for the authority of the Scriptures, and ſuch evidence, as they who reject in other caſes, are eſteemed unreaſonable.

I ſhould come now to the

5th, and laſt thing, namely, that it is unreaſonable to expect, that God ſhould do more for our conviction, than to afford us a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will, ſuch as the books of the holy Scriptures are. But this I ſhall refer to another opportunity, in a particular diſcourſe upon the 31*ſt verſe*, which contains the main deſign, the ſum and ſubſtance of this whole parable.

SER-

SERMON LXXIV.

The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*.

The Third Sermon on this Text. Preached at White-hall, Ann. 1678.

LUKE. XVI. 31.

If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.

THESE words are the concluſion of that excellent parable of our Saviour concerning the rich man and *Lazarus*, and they are the final anſwer which *Abraham* gives to the rich man's laſt requeſt; who being in great *torment*, and not able to obtain any eaſe for himſelf, is repreſented as concerned for his relations, whom he had left behind him upon earth, leſt they alſo by their own careleſſneſs and folly ſhould plunge themſelves into the ſame miſery that he was in; and therefore he begs of *Abraham*, that he would *ſend Lazarus to his father's houſe*, where he had *five brethren, that he might teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo ſhould come to that place of torment*. To which requeſt *Abraham* anſwers, that there was no neceſſity of ſuch an extraordinary courſe to be uſed towards thoſe who had ſufficient means of conviction ſo near at hand, if they would but hearken to them, and make uſe of them. *Abraham ſaith unto him, they have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

But the rich man preſſeth his requeſt further, upon this reaſon, that they might not perhaps be moved by *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, nay, it was likely they would not be moved by them; for they had always had them, and yet they remained impenitent: But if a ſpecial meſſenger ſhould be ſent to them from the dead, this certainly could not fail to awaken them, and bring them to repentance, *v* 30. *And he ſaid, nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent.* To which *Abraham* makes this peremptory reply, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.*

In which words *Abraham* abſolutely denies that there is any ſuch probability much leſs certainty that thoſe who reject a publick credible revelation of God, ſuch as that of the holy Scripture is, ſhould be effectually convinced by a meſſenger from the dead. And our Saviour brings in *Abraham* delivering himſelf very poſitively in this matter, and therefore we may preſume it to be our Saviour's own ſenſe, and may rely upon it for a truth; which however at firſt ſight it may not be ſo evident, yet I hope in the progreſs of this diſcourſe to make it ſufficiently clear.

But before I undertake that, I ſhall premiſe a caution or two to prevent all miſtake in this matter.

Firſt, That we are not to underſtand theſe words too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, as if the thing were ſimply and in itſelf impoſſible, that a man who is not convinced by hearing or reading *Moſes* and *the Prophets*, ſhould be brought to repentance any other way. For it is very poſſible in the nature of the thing, yea, and likely enough, that a man who is not convinced by calm evidence and perſuaſion, may yet be very much wrought upon by a ſtrange and amazing accident; and if one, whom he had known when he was alive, ſhould appear to him from the dead, and declare the certainty of a future ſtate, and the condition of things in another world, there is little doubt to be made, but that this would more rouze and awaken him to conſider his danger, than all the threatnings of God's word; and it is very poſſible that by the concurrence of God's grace, this might prove an effectual means to convince ſuch a man, and to bring him to repentance. And yet for all this, it is not probable upon the whole matter, and if all circumſtances be duly conſidered, that this ſhould generally have a permanent effect upon men, ſo as throughly to reclaim ſuch perſons as do obſtinately reſiſt the light and counſels of God's word.

Secondly, Another caution I would give is this, that we are not to underſtand theſe words ſo, as to weaken the force of that argument from miracles for the proof and confirmation of a divine doctrine; as if our Saviour intended to inſinuate, that miracles are not a proper and ſufficient argument to convince men. For our Saviour does not here oppoſe *Moſes* and *the Prophets* to a miraculous teſtimony; but he advanceth the publick evidence and teſtimony which *Moſes* and *the Prophets* had above the evidence of a ſingle and private miracle; for *Moſes* and *the Prophets* had their confirmation from miracles; and miracles are the great evidence and atteſtation which God hath always given to the divinity of any perſon or doctrine; and therefore *Abraham* cannot be thought to ſpeak any thing to the prejudice of miracles, when he ſays, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, tho' one roſe from the dead.* Nay, ſo far is he from that, that this reaſoning of his is rather for the advantage of miracles. For *Moſes* and *the Prophets* had the confirmation of many and great, of publick and unqueſtionable miracles; a credible relation whereof was conveyed down to after ages. So that if rational means of conviction were the thing deſired, it was not likely that thoſe, who were not perſuaded by *Moſes* and *the Prophets,* which were acknowledged by themſelves to have had the confirmation of ſo many undoubted miracles, ſhould in reaſon be convinced by a private and ſingle miracle.

Theſe conſiderations being premiſed by way of caution, I come now to make out the truth of what is here aſſerted in the text. And for the full clearing of this matter, I ſhall ſpeak to theſe *two* propoſitions:

Firſt, That it is unreaſonable to expect that God ſhould do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will; ſuch as that of the holy Scriptures is. And if ſo, then,

Secondly, That upon the whole matter it is very improbable, that thoſe who reject this publick revelation of God, ſhould be effectually convinced, tho' one ſhould ſpeak to them from the dead.

Firſt, That it is unreaſonable to expect that God ſhould do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a ſtanding revelation of his mind and will; ſuch as that of the holy Scriptures is. This is ſtrongly implyed in *Abraham*'s firſt anſwer, *They have Moſes and the Prophets, let them hear them;* as if he had ſaid, having ſuch means of conviction ſo near at hand, why ſhould they deſire and expect any other? It is in this caſe of the ſcriptures, as in that of God's providence; God does not commonly prove his providence to men by extraordinary inſtances of his power, and by changing the courſe of nature, to convince every man in the world that he governs it: but by ſtanding teſtimonies of his wiſdom and power, and goodneſs; by theſe God does ſufficiently ſatisfy conſiderate men of his government and care of the world; and tho' he do ſeldom manifeſt himſelf in ſupernatural and extraordinary ways, yet he hath not left himſelf without a witneſs, by the conſtant courſe of nature, in the returns of day and night, in the revolutions of the ſeaſons of the year, *in that he gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs.* And theſe ſtanding arguments of his providence, tho' they be not ſo much taken notice of, becauſe they are ſo common, yet they are daily miracles, and we can hardly imagine greater, and we ſhould be ſtrangely amazed at them, but that they are ſo very frequent and familiar.

The caſe is the ſame as to divine revelation. God hath not thought fit to gratify the perverſe curioſity of men, by affording to every man a particular and immediate revelation of his mind and will: but he hath given us a ſtanding revelation, which at firſt had the greateſt and moſt miraculous confirmation, and he hath ſtill left us ſufficient means of being aſſured of the truth of this revelation, and of the confirmation that was at the firſt given to it; and we tempt God, by demanding extraordinary ſigns, when we may receive ſo abundant ſatisfaction in an ordinary way. This being admitted, I ſhall proceed in the

Second place to ſhew, that it is upon the whole matter, and all circumſtances conſidered, very improbable, that thoſe who reject this publick revelation from God, ſhould be effectually convinced, tho' one ſhould ſpeak to them from the dead. And this is that which is expreſly aſſerted here in the text, *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, tho' one roſe from the dead.* Not but that any man would be very much ſtartled and amazed, if one ſhould come from the dead to warn him out of the danger of his wicked life; but yet for all that, it is very unlikely that they who obſtinately and perverſely refuſe to be convinced by *Moſes* and *the Prophets,* would be effectually perſuaded, (that is, ſo as to be brought to repentance and reformation of their lives) *tho' one ſhould riſe from the dead.* And that for theſe reaſons:

1. Becauſe if ſuch miracles were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect; and unleſs we ſuppoſe them common and ordinary, we have no reaſon to expect them at all.

2. Men have as great or greater reaſon to believe the threatnings of God's word, as the diſcourſe of one that ſhould ſpeak to them from the dead.

3. The very ſame reaſon which makes men to reject the counſels of God in his word, would in all probability hinder them from being convinced by a particular miracle.

4. Experience does abundantly teſtify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince thoſe who are obſtinately addicted and wedded to their luſts.

5. An effectual perſuaſion (that is, ſuch a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of God's grace, which there is no reaſon to expect either in an extraordinary way, or in an extraordinary degree, after men have obſtinately rejected the ordinary means which God hath appointed to that end.

1. If ſuch miracles, as a ſpecial meſſenger from the dead to warn and admoniſh men, were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect upon men; and unleſs we ſuppoſe them common and ordinary, we have no reaſon to expect them at all. For it is unreaſonable at firſt ſight, that the worſt and moſt obſtinate ſort of ſinners ſhould expect this, as a peculiar favour and privilege to themſelves, and that God ſhould not do as much for others, who have deſerved it more, and would probably make better uſe of it; and if theſe things were common, it is very probable that men would not be much moved by them. It may be, while the apprehenſion of ſuch a thing were freſh upon them, they would take up ſome good reſolutions; as ſinners uſually do, while they are under preſent convictions of conſcience, and the hand of God, by ſome great affliction or ſickneſs, lies heavy upon them: but ſtill they would be apt to defer their repentance, and put it off 'till the preſent amazement were a little over and the terror of their firſt apprehenſions were abated and worn off by degrees, and after a little while they would return to their former courſe. And this is too probable, from what we ſee men do in other caſes not very much remote from this. It is a very terrible and amazing thing to ſee a man die, and ſolemnly take his laſt leave of the world. The very circumſtances of dying men are apt to ſtrike us with horror: to hear ſuch a man how ſenſibly he will ſpeak of the other world, as if he were juſt come from it, rather than going to it; how ſeverely he will condemn himſelf for the folly and wickedneſs of his life; with what paſſion he will wiſh that he had lived better, and ſerved God more ſincerely; how ſeriouſly he will reſolve upon a better life, if God would be pleaſed to raiſe him up, and try him but once more; with what zeal and earneſtneſs he will commend to his beſt friends and neareſt relations a religious and virtuous courſe of life, as the only thing that will miniſter comfort to them when they come to be in his condition. Such diſcourſes as theſe are very apt to move and affect men for the time, and to ſtir up in them very good reſolutions, whilſt the preſent fit and impreſſion laſts: but becauſe theſe ſights are very frequent, they have ſeldom any great and permanent effect upon men. Men conſider that it is a very common caſe, and ſinners take example and encouragement from one another; every one is affected for the preſent, but few are ſo effectually convinced, as to betake themſelves to a better courſe.

And if apparitions from the dead were as common as it is for men to die, we may reaſonably preſume that the diſcourſes of dead and dying, of thoſe that are going, and thoſe who come from the dead, would have much the ſame effect upon the generality of men.

But if we ſuppoſe this a ſingular caſe, (which there is no reaſon to do) in that caſe the effect would probably be this; a man that was ſtrongly addicted to his luſts, and had no mind to leave them, would be apt, when the fright was over, to be eaſily perſuaded that all this was merely the work of fancy and imagination; and the rather, becauſe ſuch things did not happen to others as well as to himſelf.

2. We have as great or greater reaſon to believe the warnings or threatnings of God's word, as the diſcourſes of one that ſhould come to us from the dead. For the threatnings of God's word againſt ſuch ſins as natural light convinceth men of, have the natural guilt and fears of men on their ſide, the particular teſtimony of every man's conſcience, and the concurrent teſtimony of mankind to the probability of the thing; and to give us full aſſurance of the truth and reality of them, we have a credible relation of great and unqueſtionable miracles wrought on purpoſe to give teſtimony to thoſe perſons who denounced thoſe threatnings, that they came from God. So that here is a very publick and authentick teſtimony given to the threatnings of God's word, more ſuitable to the generality of mankind, and of greater authority than a private apparition, or a ſingle miracle; and if that will not convince men, why ſhould we ſuppoſe that *this* will?

3. The very ſame reaſon which makes men to *reject the counſels of God* in his word, would, in all probability, hinder men from being convinced by an apparition from the dead. It is not generally for want of evidence, that men do not yield a full and effectual aſſent to the truth of God's word, I mean, that they do not believe it ſo as to obey it; but from the intereſt of ſome luſt. The true cauſe is not in mens underſtandings, and becauſe there is not reaſon enough to ſatisfy them, that the Scriptures are the word of God: but in the obſtinacy of their wills, which are enſlaved to their luſts. And the diſeaſe being there, it is not to be cured by more evidence, but by more conſideration, and by the grace of God, and better reſolutions.

The man is addicted to ſome vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain thoſe truths which would check and controul him in his courſe. The Light of God's word is offenſive to him, and therefore he would ſhut it out. This account our bleſſed Saviour gives of the enmity of the *Jews* againſt him and his doctrine, *John.* iii. 19. *Light is come into the world, and men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil; for every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* Upon the ſame account it is, that men reſiſt the doctrine of the holy Scriptures; not becauſe they have ſufficient reaſon to doubt of their divine authority; but becauſe they are unwilling to be governed by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book: For the wills of men have a great influence upon their underſtandings, to make aſſent eaſy or difficult; and as men are apt to aſſent to what they have a mind to, ſo they are ſlow to believe any thing which croſſeth their humours and inclinations; ſo that tho' greater evidence were offer'd, it is likely it would not prevail with them, becauſe the matter does not ſtick there. Their wills are diſtemper'd, *men hate to be reformed*, and this makes them *caſt the laws of God behind their backs*; and if God himſelf ſhould ſpeak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of *Iſrael*, yet for all that, they might continue *a ſtiff-necked and rebellious people.* Tho' the evidence were ſuch as their underſtandings could not reſiſt; yet their wills might ſtill hold out, and the preſent condition of their minds might have no laſting influence upon their hearts and lives; ſuch a violent conviction might effect them for the preſent, but the ſenſe of it might perhaps wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardneſs. Men by a long and obſtinate continuance in ſin, may bring themſelves to the temper and diſpoſition of devils; who though *they believe and tremble* at the thoughts of God and his threatnings, yet they are wicked ſtill; for ſo long as men retain a ſtrong affection for their luſts, they will break through all conviction, and what evidence ſoever be offer'd to them, they will find ſome way or other to avoid it, and to delude themſelves. The plain truth of the caſe is this, (if men will honeſtly ſpeak their conſciences, they cannot deny it) they do not call for more evidence, either becauſe they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it, but that they may ſeem to have ſome excuſe for themſelves, for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4thly. Experience does abundantly teſtify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and ſuch as are obſtinately addicted to their luſts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the hiſtory of the Bible. What wonders were wrought in the ſight of *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians!* yet they were harden'd under all theſe plagues. *Balaam*, who *greedily followed the wages of unrighteouſneſs*, was not to be ſtopt by the admonition of an angel. The *Jews*, after ſo many miracles which their eyes had ſeen, continu'd to be a *ſtiff-necked and gainſaying people*; ſo that it is hard to ſay which was more prodigious, the wonders which God wrought for them, or their rebellions againſt him; and when, *in the fulneſs of time*, the Son of God came, and did among them *the works which never man did*, ſuch, as one would have thought might have brought the worſt people in the world to repentance, thoſe of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, yet they repented not. Yea the very thing which the rich man here in my text requeſted of *Abraham* for his brethren, was done among them; *Lazarus* did *riſe from the dead*, and *teſtified unto them*, and *they were not perſuaded.*

And which is yet more, our Saviour himſelf, according to his own prediction while he was alive, *roſe again from the dead the third day*, and was viſibly taken up into heaven; and yet how few among them did *believe*, and *give glory to God?* So that we ſee the very thing here ſpoken of in the text, made good in a famous inſtance; they who *believed not Moſes and the Prophets*, which teſtified of the *Meſſias*, were *not perſuaded* when *he roſe from the dead.*

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of God have had upon thoſe who were not reclaimed by his word? It is not long ſince God ſhewed himſelf among us, by *terrible things in righteouſneſs*, and viſited us with three of his ſoreſt judgments, war, and peſtilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedneſs and impiety ſtill reign and rage among us; it is a very ſad conſideration to ſee how little thoſe who have out-lived theſe plagues, have been reformed by them; *we have not return'd to the Lord, nor ſought him for all this.*

I may appeal to the experience of particular perſons. How frequently do we ſee men, after great afflictions, and tedious ſufferings, and dangerous ſickneſſes, return to their former evil courſes! and tho' they have been upon the brink of eternity, and *the terrors of* *death have compaſſed them about, and the pains of hell have* almoſt *taken hold of them*, though they have had as lively and ſenſible convictions of another world, as if they had ſpoken with thoſe that had come from thence, or even been there themſelves; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery have been as mad, as furious ſinners as they were before; ſo that it ought to be no ſuch wonder to us, which the text tells us, that *if men hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.* Eſpecially, if we conſider in the

5th and laſt place, that an effectual perſuaſion (that is, ſuch a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obſtinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by God for that end. To be effectually perſuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the aſſiſtance of God's grace; and there is little reaſon to expect that God will afford his grace to thoſe who reject and deſpiſe the counſels of his word. The doctrine of ſalvation contained in the holy ſcriptures, and the promiſes and threatnings of God's word, are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the converſion of men, and to bring them to repentance; and if we ſincerely uſe theſe means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of God's grace to make them effectual; but if we neglect and reſiſt theſe means, in confidence that God ſhould attempt our recovery by ſome extraordinary ways; though he ſhould gratify our preſumptuous and unreaſonable curioſity, ſo far as to ſend *one from the dead to teſtify unto us*; yet we have no reaſon to expect the aſſiſtance of his grace, to make ſuch a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have ſo long deſpiſed his word, and reſiſted his ſpirit, which are *the power of God unto ſalvation.*

Without his grace and aſſiſtance, the moſt probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures; *by grace we are ſaved*, and *that not of ourſelves, it is the gift of God.* This grace is revealed to us in the goſpel; and the aſſiſtances of it are conveyed to us by the goſpel; and it is great preſumption to promiſe to ourſelves the aſſiſtance of God's grace in any other way than he hath been pleaſed to promiſe it to us.

And thus I have ſhewn you, as briefly and plainly as I could, how unlikely it is, that thoſe who obſtinately reject a clear and publick revelation of God, ſhould be effectually convinced and brought to repentance by any apparitions from the dead.

I ſhall only make two or three inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made, and ſo conclude.

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Nor would *Abraham* have ſaid again, *if they hear not Moſes and the prophets. neither will they be perſuaded.* For how ſhould men hear what they cannot underſtand, ſo as to be perſuaded by it?

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The man is addicted to ſome vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain thoſe truths which would check and controul him in his courſe. The Light of God's word is offenſive to him, and therefore he would ſhut it out. This account our bleſſed Saviour gives of the enmity of the *Jews* againſt him and his doctrine, *John.* iii. 19. *Light is come into the world, and men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil; for every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved.* Upon the ſame account it is, that men reſiſt the doctrine of the holy Scriptures; not becauſe they have ſufficient reaſon to doubt of their divine authority; but becauſe they are unwilling to be governed by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book: For the wills of men have a great influence upon their underſtandings, to make aſſent eaſy or difficult; and as men are apt to aſſent to what they have a mind to, ſo they are ſlow to believe any thing which croſſeth their humours and inclinations; ſo that tho' greater evidence were offer'd, it is likely it would not prevail with them, becauſe the matter does not ſtick there. Their wills are diſtemper'd, *men hate to be reformed,* and this makes them *caſt the laws of God behind their backs*; and if God himſelf ſhould ſpeak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of *Iſrael,* yet for all that, they might continue *a ſtiff-necked and rebellious people.* Tho' the evidence were ſuch as their underſtandings could not reſiſt; yet their wills might ſtill hold out, and the preſent condition of their minds might have no laſting influence upon their hearts and lives; ſuch a violent conviction might effect them for the preſent, but the ſenſe of it might perhaps wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardneſs. Men by a long and obſtinate continuance in ſin, may bring themſelves to the temper and diſpoſition of devils; who though *they believe and tremble* at the thoughts of God and his threatnings, yet they are wicked ſtill; for ſo long as men retain a ſtrong affection for their luſts, they will break through all conviction, and what evidence ſoever be offer'd to them, they will find ſome way or other to avoid it, and to delude themſelves. The plain truth of the caſe is this, (if men will honeſtly ſpeak their conſciences, they cannot deny it) they do not call for more evidence, either becauſe they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it, but that they may ſeem to have ſome excuſe for themſelves, for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4*thly.* Experience does abundantly teſtify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and ſuch as are obſtinately addicted to their luſts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the hiſtory of the Bible. What wonders were wrought in the ſight of *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians!* yet they were harden'd under all theſe plagues. *Balaam,* who *greedily followed the wages of unrighteouſneſs,* was not to be ſtopt by the admonition of an angel. The *Jews,* after ſo many miracles which their eyes had ſeen, continu'd to be a *ſtiff-necked and gainſaying people*; ſo that it is hard to ſay which was more prodigious, the wonders which God wrought for them, or their rebellions againſt him; and when, *in the fulneſs of time,* the Son of God came, and did among them *the works which never man did,* ſuch, as one would have thought might have brought the worſt people in the world to repentance, thoſe of *Tyre* and *Sidon,* of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah,* yet they repented not. Yea the very thing which the rich man here in my text requeſted of *Abraham* for his brethren, was done among them; *Lazarus* did *riſe from the dead,* and *teſtified unto them,* and *they were not perſuaded.*

And which is yet more, our Saviour himſelf, according to his own prediction while he was alive, *roſe again from the dead the third day,* and was viſibly taken up into heaven; and yet how few among them did *believe,* and *give glory to God?* So that we ſee the very thing here ſpoken of in the text, made good in a famous inſtance; they who *believed not Moſes and the Prophets,* which teſtified of the *Meſſias,* were *not perſuaded* when *he roſe from the dead.*

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of God have had upon thoſe who were not reclaimed by his word? It is not long ſince God ſhewed himſelf among us, by *terrible things in righteouſneſs,* and viſited us with three of his ſoreſt judgments, war, and peſtilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedneſs and impiety ſtill reign and rage among us; it is a very ſad conſideration to ſee how little thoſe who have out-lived theſe plagues, have been reformed by them; *we have not return'd to the Lord, nor ſought him for all this.*

I may appeal to the experience of particular perſons. How frequently do we ſee men, after great afflictions, and tedious ſufferings, and dangerous ſickneſſes, return to their former evil courſes! and tho' they have been upon the brink of eternity, and *the terrors of* *death have compaſſed them about, and the pains of hell have* almoſt *taken hold of them,* though they have had as lively and ſenſible convictions of another world, as if they had ſpoken with thoſe that had come from thence, or even been there themſelves; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery have been as mad, as furious ſinners as they were before; ſo that it ought to be no ſuch wonder to us, which the text tells us, that *if men hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.* Eſpecially, if we conſider in the

5th and laſt place, that an effectual perſuaſion (that is, ſuch a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obſtinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by God for that end. To be effectually perſuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the aſſiſtance of God's grace; and there is little reaſon to expect that God will afford his grace to thoſe who reject and deſpiſe the counſels of his word. The doctrine of ſalvation contained in the holy ſcriptures, and the promiſes and threatnings of God's word, are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the converſion of men, and to bring them to repentance; and if we ſincerely uſe theſe means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of God's grace to make them effectual; but if we neglect and reſiſt theſe means, in confidence that God ſhould attempt our recovery by ſome extraordinary ways; though he ſhould gratify our preſumptuous and unreaſonable curioſity, ſo far as to ſend *one from the dead to teſtify unto us*; yet we have no reaſon to expect the aſſiſtance of his grace, to make ſuch a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have ſo long deſpiſed his word, and reſiſted his ſpirit, which are *the power of God unto ſalvation.*

Without his grace and aſſiſtance, the moſt probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures; *by grace we are ſaved,* and *that not of ourſelves, it is the gift of God.* This grace is revealed to us in the goſpel; and the aſſiſtances of it are conveyed to us by the goſpel; and it is great preſumption to promiſe to ourſelves the aſſiſtance of God's grace in any other way than he hath been pleaſed to promiſe it to us.

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But I paſs from this, to that which does more immediately concern our practice.

2dly, Let us hear and obey that publick revelation of God's will, which in ſo much mercy to mankind, he hath been pleaſed to afford to us. This is an ineſtimable privilege and advantage which the world in many ages was deſtitute of; having no other guide to conduct them to eternal happineſs but the light of nature, and ſome particular revelations, which now and then God was pleaſed to make of his will to men: But now God hath ſet up a great and ſtanding light in the world, the doctrines of the holy ſcriptures; and by the goſpel of his bleſſed Son, hath *given the knowledge of ſalvation to all men, for the remiſſion of their ſins, through the tender mercies of God, whereby the day-ſpring from on high hath viſited us, to give light to them that ſit in darkneſs and in the ſhadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace*, to convince us of the error of our ways, and to direct us in our duty. *We, upon whom the ends of the world are come*, do enjoy all the advantages of divine revelation which the world ever had, and as great as the world ever ſhall have. *God in theſe laſt days hath ſpoken unto us by his Son*, and if we will not hear him, God will employ no other extraordinary prophet and meſſenger to us. *If the wrath of God* ſo clearly *revealed from heaven by the goſpel of our bleſſed Saviour, againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men*; if the terror of the great day, and the fear of eternal torments; if the dreadful ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins, and the merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and the glorious hopes of eternal life and happineſs, will not prevail with us to leave our ſins, and to amend our lives, we have no reaſon to expect that God ſhould uſe any farther means to reclaim us; that he ſhould ever make any more attempts for our recovery. And therefore,

3dly and *laſtly*, Thoſe who are not brought to repentance, and effectually *perſuaded* by this clear and publick revelation which God hath made of his will to men in the holy ſcriptures, have reaſon to look upon their caſe as deſperate.

Methinks it ſhould not be a deſirable thing to any of us to be convinced by an apparition, the thing is ſo dreadful and full of terror; beſides, that it argues men to be ſtrangely hardned in a bad courſe, and obſtinately bent upon their evil ways, when nothing will affright them from their ſins, but what will almoſt put them out of their wits; when nothing will keep them from running into hell, but a fearful and ghaſtly meſſenger from thence. What a terrible ſight would it be to any of us, to meet one of our companions, whom we had lately known in the world, freſh come out of thoſe flames, with a ſmell of fire and brimſtone upon him! What imagination can paint to itſelf the dread and horror of ſuch a ſpectacle! The rich man here in the parable, when he was in hell, is repreſented as ſenſible of the inconvenience of this, and therefore he did not deſire to be ſent himſelf to his brethren, but deſired that *Lazarus* might go and teſtify unto them: He was apprehenſive how frightful a ſight he himſelf muſt needs have been to them; and therefore he deſires that they might have a gentler warning by one, who from out of *Abraham*'s boſom had ſeen the miſeries of the damned, but enjoyed the ſtate of the bleſſed.

But let not us tempt God by any ſuch unreaſonable demand, who ſpeaks to us every day by the plain declarations of his word, and hath of late years called ſo loudly upon us by the voice of his providence, to repent and turn to him; by ſo many miracles of mercy and deliverance, as God hardly ever wrought for any prince and people, and by ſuch terrible vollies of judgments, and full *viols of wrath*, as have ſeldom been poured out upon any nation. God ſpeaks to you by his miniſters, men like your ſelves (God knows, poor frail and ſinful men!) but we are ſure, that when we call you to repentance, we deliver to you the will and pleaſure, the counſels and commands of the great God, which (whatever account may be made of us) do certainly challenge your moſt awful attention and regard. And we are ſenſible that we are called to a very difficult and unpleaſant work, to contend with the luſts and vices of men, to ſtrive againſt the ſtrong and impetuous ſtream of a wicked and perverſe generation; and nothing in the world could move us to this unwelcome and grievous importunity, but a great and juſt ſenſe of our own duty, and your danger. And if we will not take theſe warnings, why ſhould we expect that God ſhould vouchſafe to ſend an expreſs meſſenger to us from the other world, to certify us how all things are there, and that not ſo much to help the weakneſs of our faith, as to humour the perverſeneſs of our infidelity? And why ſhould we imagine that this courſe would prove more effectual? *Let us not deceive our ſelves,* the ſame luſts which now detain men ſo ſtrongly in impenitency and unbelief, would, in all probability, hurry them on to hell, though an angel from heaven ſhould meet them in their way, to give a ſtop to them. This indeed might ſtartle us; but nothing is like to ſave us, if the word of God and his grace do not.

But are we in earneſt, and would we *be perſuaded if one ſhould riſe from the dead?* God hath condeſcended thus far to us, there is *one riſen from the dead to teſtify unto us,* Jeſus the Son of God, who *died for our ſins, and roſe again for our juſtification,* and is aſcended into heaven, and ſet down at the right hand of God, *to aſſure* us of a bleſſed reſurrection, and a glorious immortality. And if this will not ſatisfy us, God will gratify our curioſity no farther. If we *will not believe him, whom God hath ſent,* and to convince us that he hath ſent him, hath *raiſed him up from the dead, we ſhall die in our ſins,* and periſh in our impenitency. God hath in great mercy to mankind done that which is abundantly ſufficient to convince thoſe who are of a teachable temper and diſpoſition: but in great wiſdom and juſtice he hath not thought fit to provide any remedy for the wilful obſtinacy and intractable perverſeneſs of men.

Now God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, perſuade us all, *to break off our ſins by repentance, and to give glory to God,* before death and darkneſs come, and the day of our final viſitation overtake us, when we may perhaps be ſurprized by a ſudden ſtroke, or ſeized upon by a violent diſeaſe, and may have no ſenſe and apprehenſion of our approaching danger; or if we have, *may find no place for repentance, though we ſeek it with tears;* which God grant may never happen to be the caſe of any of us, for his mercies ſake in Chriſt Jeſus, *To whom, with the Father,* &c.

SERMON LXXV.

The Children of this World wiſer than the Children of Light.

LUKE xvi. 8.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light.

Preached at Whitehall, Ann 1683.

THESE words are in the parable of the rich man's ſteward, who being called upon to give up his accounts, in order to his being diſcharged from his office, caſt about with himſelf, what courſe he had beſt to take, to provide for his ſubſiſtence, when he ſhould be turned out of his employment. At laſt he reſolves upon this; that he will go to his Lord's debtors, and take a favourable account of them; and inſtead of *a hundred meaſures of oil, write down fifty*; and inſtead of *a hundred meaſures of wheat, write down fourſcore*; that by this means he might oblige them to be kind to him in his neceſſity. The Lord hearing of this, commends the unjuſt ſteward, *becauſe he had done wiſely*; that is, he took notice of his diſhoneſty, but praiſed his ſhrewdneſs and ſagacity, as having done prudently for himſelf, though he did not deal juſtly with him. And this is uſual among men; when we ſee a man ingeniouſly bad, to commend his wit, and to ſay it is great pity he doth not uſe it better, and apply it to good purpoſes. Upon the whole, our Saviour makes this obſervation; *that the children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light*; as if he had ſaid, thus did this worldly wiſe man; thus provident was he for his future ſecurity and ſubſiſtance. He no ſooner underſtands that he is to be turned out of his office, but he conſiders what proviſion to make for himſelf againſt that time. And is it not pity, that good men do not apply this wiſdom to better and greater purpoſes? For is not every man ſuch a ſteward, intruſted by God with the bleſſings of this life, and many opportunities of doing good? For all which, ſince he muſt ſhortly give an account, he ought in all reaſon ſo to uſe them, as thereby to provide for the happineſs of another life, againſt this temporal life have an end.

And this is all the parallel intended in this parable, as we may ſee by our Saviour's application of it. For parables are not to be ſtretched to an exact parallel in all the parts and circumſtances of them, but only to be applied to the particular point and purpoſe intended. A parable, and the moral accomodation of it, being (as one well obſerves) not like two planes, which touch one another in every part, but like a globe upon a plane, which only toucheth in one point. Thus our Saviour ſeparates the wiſdom of this ſteward from his injuſtice, and propoſeth *that* to our imitation; *The children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light.*

The words are a compariſon; in which we have

1ſt, The perſons compared, *the children of this world*, and the *children of light*. It is a very uſual phraſe among the *Hebrews*, when they would expreſs any thing to partake of ſuch a nature or quality, to call it the Son or child of ſuch a thing. Thus good men are called *the children of God*, and bad men *the children of the devil*; thoſe who mind earthly things, and make the things of this world their greateſt aim and deſign, are called *the children of this world*; and thoſe who are better enlightened with the knowledge of their own immortality, and the belief of a future ſtate after this life, are called *the children of light*.

2dly, Here is the thing wherein they are compared, and that is, as to their wiſdom and prudence.

3dly, The object of this prudence, which is not the ſame in both; as if the ſenſe were, that *the children of this world are wiſer than the children of light* as to the things of this world; but here are two ſeveral objects intended, about which the prudence of theſe two ſorts of perſons is reſpectively exerciſed; the concernments of this world and the other. And our Saviour's meaning is, that *the children of this world are wiſer in their generation*, that is, in *their way*, viz. as to the intereſts and concernments of this world, *than the children of light* are in *theirs*, viz. as to the intereſts and concernments of the other world.

4thly. Here is a deciſion of the matter, and which of them it is that excels in point of prudence, in *their way*; and our Saviour gives it to the *children of this world*; *they are wiſer in their generation than the children of light*.

Now this propoſition is not to be taken in the utmoſt ſtrictneſs and rigor; as if it were univerſally true, and without any exception, as if no man had ever been ſo wiſe and provident for his ſoul, and the concernments of another world, as worldly men are for the intereſts and concernments of this life. For there are ſome that are fools at large, and imprudent in their whole conduct and management, both as to their affairs of this world, and the other; who are, in too ſtrict a ſenſe, *the children of this world:* They mind nothing but this world, and yet are groſly imprudent, even in their proſecution of their temporal intereſts: They neglect and forego all other worldly advantages, for the ſake of a little ſenſual pleaſure; and then they loſe and deſtroy that too,

by

by an over-hot and eager purſuit of it, and turn it at laſt into gall and wormwood. And there are others (as St. *Paul* for inſtance) who, I doubt not, have been as prudent and zealous, and induſtrious for the promoting of religion, and the ſalvation of themſelves and others, as any man can be about the affairs of this preſent life; and I hope there are ſome ſuch in every Age; but God knows there are very few, and their wiſdom and induſtry is ſeldom ſo equal, and conſtant, and uniform, as that of *the men of this world*.

So that we are to underſtand this ſaying of our Saviour's with the ſame allowance as we generally do all moral and proverbial Speeches, that they are true for the moſt part, and the inſtances and exceptions to the contrary are very rare. It is ſeldom ſeen, that good men are ſo wiſe for the concernments of their ſouls, and of religion, as many worldly men are for their worldly intereſt.

In ſpeaking to this propoſition, I ſhall do theſe *three* things.

Firſt, Confirm and illuſtrate the truth of it, by conſidering the ſeveral parts and properties of wiſdom.

Secondly, Give ſome probable account of this, by conſidering what advantages *the children of this world* have above *the children of light*.

Thirdly, I ſhall draw ſome inferences from the whole, by way of application.

Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to confirm and illuſtrate the truth of this, by conſidering the ſeveral parts and properties of wiſdom. Now this is wiſdom, to mind and regard our chief end, and by all means to promote it; and this regard to our chief end doth expreſs it ſelf chiefly in theſe particulars; in our being firmly fixed and reſolved upon it; in chuſing the fitteſt means for the compaſſing and accompliſhing of it; in a diligent uſe of thoſe means; in an invincible conſtancy and perſeverance in the proſecution of it; and in making all things to ſubmit and to ſtoop to it. Theſe are the principal parts and properties of wiſdom; and I ſhall ſhew that in all theſe *the children of this world* do uſually excel the *children of light*.

1ſt, They are uſually more firmly fixed and reſolved upon their end. Whatever they ſet up for their end, riches, or honours, or pleaſures, they are fixed upon it, and ſteady in the proſecution of it. If they ſet up for riches or honour, they neglect and deſpiſe pleaſure, if it croſs either of thoſe ends. And this fixed reſolution of the end is the great ſpring of action, and that which inſpires men with vigour and diligence in the uſe of means; and the more reſolved men are upon the end, the more active and induſtrious they will be in the uſe of means; for the end governs the means, and gives law and meaſure to our activity and induſtry in the uſe of them, and ſweetens and allays the trouble and difficulty of them.

So that where the end is once firmly fixed and reſolved upon, there will not be wanting fervour of proſecution; but if we be wavering and unſteady as to our end, this will weaken our hands, and quench the heat of our endeavours, and abate the eagerneſs of our purſuit, and according to the degree of it, will derive a debility and inconſtancy into all our motions. *The double-minded man* (as St. *James* ſays) *is unſtable in all his ways.* Now *the children of this world* are commonly more fixed and reſolved upon their end, than *the children of light*. It is rare to ſee the whole life and actions of a good man, ſo conſtantly and uniformly conſpiring to the furtherance of his great end, ſo directly tending to the ſalvation of his ſoul, and the increaſe of his glory and happineſs in another world, as the actions of a worldly man, and the whole courſe of his life do to the advancing of his worldly intereſts. The covetous or ambitious men ſeldom do any thing to the beſt of their knowledge, that is impertinent to their end, much leſs contrary to it; through every thing that they do, one may plainly ſee the end they aim at, and that they are always true to it: Whereas the beſt men do many things which are plainly croſs and contrary to their end, and a great many more which have no relation to it; and when they mind it, it is rather by fits and ſtarts, than in any even courſe and tenour of actions.

And of this we have a famous inſtance in that worldly and ſecular church, which now for ſeveral hundreds of years hath more ſteadily purſued the end of ſecular greatneſs and dominion, than any other church hath done the ends of true religion, the glory of God, and the ſalvation of the ſouls of men; ſo that there is hardly any doctrine or practice peculiar to that church, and differing from our common chriſtianity, but it hath a direct and viſible tendency to the promoting of ſome worldly intereſt

reſt or other. For inſtance, why do they deny the people the holy ſcriptures and the ſervice of God in a language which they can underſtand; but that by keeping them in ignorance, they may have them in more perfect ſlavery and ſubjection to them? Why do they forbid their prieſts to marry, but that they may have no intereſt diſtinct from that of their church, and leave all to it when they die? To what end is auricular confeſſion, but to keep people in awe, by the knowledge of their ſecrets? Why muſt the laity only receive the ſacrament in one kind, but to draw a greater reverence to the prieſt, whoſe privilege it ſhall be to receive in both? And why is the intention of the prieſt neceſſary to the efficacy of the ſacraments, but to perſuade the people, that notwithſtanding the gracious intention of God toward mankind, they cannot be ſaved without the good-will of the prieſt? The doctrines of purgatory and indulgences are a plain device to make their markets of the ſins and ſouls of men. I might inſtance in a hundred things more in that church which are of the ſame tendency. This St. *John* foretold ſhould be the character of the ſpirit of antichriſt, that it ſhould be a worldly ſpirit, and the doctrines of it ſhould ſerve a ſecular intereſt and deſign, 1 *John* iv. 5. *They are of the world, and they ſpeak from the world, and the world hears them.* What church is there in the world ſo true throughout to the intereſt of religion, as this worldly church hath been to its own ſecular power and greatneſs.

2*dly*, *The children of this world* are wiſer in the choice of means in order to their end; and this is a great part of wiſdom. For ſome means will bring about an end with leſs pains and difficulty, and expence of time than others. And the men of the world are very ingenious in diſcerning the fitneſs and force of means to their ſeveral ends. To what a certainty have men reduced all the ways and arts of gain, and growing rich, and of riſing to honour and preferment? What long trains will men lay to bring about their deſired end? What ſubtil methods have men deviſed, to inſinuate themſelves into court; and when they are there, to plant themſelves in the eye of their prince, and in the ſun-ſhine of his favour; and then they have as many ways of worming others out, as of ſcrewing themſelves in.

But in the concernments of our ſouls, and the affairs of another world, how dull and injudicious are we? and how awkwardly and untowardly do we apply means to ends, as if men were *only wiſe to do evil, but to do good had no underſtanding*, as the prophet complains? By what incongruous and irregular means do many (who would ſeem to be, and ſometimes perhaps are, very zealous in religion) endeavour (as they think) to promote God's glory, by pious frauds and counterfeit miracles, and telling officious lies for God? What a compaſs do many men fetch to go to heaven, by innumerable devices of will-worſhip, by voluntary ſeverites, neither pleaſing to God, nor profitable to men? By tedious pilgrimages and ſenſeleſs ceremonies, and innumerable little external obſervances, of no virtue or efficacy in religion? and by wandring through a wilderneſs of opinions, and the buſhes and brakes of unprofitable queſtions, and controverſies? Whereas the way to heaven lies plain and ſtrait before us, conſiſting in ſimplicity of belief, and in holineſs and innocency of life. Not but that there are great differences in the church of *Rome* between the ſecular prieſts and the regular; between the *Janſeniſts* and the Jeſuits; but they ſtill unite in a common intereſt, and are ſubject to *antichriſt* their common head. They do not ſeparate from one another, and excommunicate one another, and declare againſt one another, that they are not of the true church: *Satan never caſts out Satan*; and though he loves diviſions among chriſtians; yet he always takes care, that *his own kingdom be not divided againſt it ſelf*, ſo as to endanger the ruin of it. And whenever they have any hopeful deſign for the extirpation of proteſtants, they can lay aſide their enmities, and be reconciled in ſuch a deſign. Then the Pope and the Kings of the earth *take counſel together*, and like *Herod* and *Pilate*, when Chriſt was to be crucified, can be made friends at a day's warning. Whereas the diviſions of the true church are pernicious to it, and, as we ſee at this day among our ſelves, our ſenſeleſs differences and wild heats on both ſides, do contribute to the ſetting up of popery, and the ruin of the reformed religion; and yet no perſuaſion, no experience can make us wiſer.

3*dly*, *The children of this world* are commonly more diligent in the uſe of means for the obtaining of their end; they will ſweat and toil, and take any pains, *riſe up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulneſs*; their thoughts are continually running upon their buſineſs, and they catch at every opportunity of promoting it; they will pinch nature and haraſs it; and rob themſelves of their reſt, and all the comfort of their lives, to raiſe their fortune and eſtate. What drudges were *Cæſar* and *Alexander* in the way of fame and ambition? How did they tire themſelves and others with long and tedious marches? To what inconveniences and dangers did they expoſe themſelves and thouſands more? What havock and deſtruction did they make in the world, that they might gain to themſelves the empty title of conquerors of it. When the men of the world engage in any deſign, how intent are they upon it, and with what vigour do they proſecute it? They do not counterfeit a diligence, and ſeem to be more ſerious and induſtrious than in truth they are; they are rather hypocrites the other way, and would conceal their covetouſneſs and ambition, and not ſeem to aſpire after riches and honours ſo much as indeed they do.

But in the purſuit of better things, how cold and remiſs are we? With what a careleſs indifference do moſt men mind their ſouls? How negligent and formal, and many times hypocritical are they in the ſervice of God, and the exerciſe of religion? With what a pitiful courage, and with what faint ſpirits do they reſiſt ſin, and encounter the temptations of it? and how often, and how eaſily are they foiled and baffled by them.

4thly, The men of the world are more invincibly conſtant and pertinacious in the purſuit of earthly things; they are not to be bribed or taken off by favour or fair words; not to be daunted by difficulties, or daſht out of countenance by the frowns and reproaches of men. Offer an ambitious man any thing ſhort of his end and aim, to take him off from the proſecution of it; he ſcorns the motion, and thinks you go about to fool him out of his intereſt. Bait a covetous man with temptations of pleaſure, to get his money from him, how generouſly will this mean-ſpirited man trample upon pleaſure, when it would tempt him from his deſign of being rich?

Difficulties do not daunt them, but whet their courage, and quicken their endeavours, and ſet a keener edge upon their ſpirits. Give an ambitious man almoſt a demonſtration of the impoſſibility of his attempts; *contrà audentior ibit*, he will go on ſo much the more boldly and reſolutely. In the ways of religion men are apt to be diſcouraged and put out of countenance, by contempt and reproach; but a covetous man is not to be jeered and flurted out of his money and eſtate; he can be content to be rich, and give leave to thoſe that are not ſo, to laugh at him.

Populus mihi ſibilat, at mihi plaudo.

The rich worldling can hug himſelf in his bags, when the world hiſſeth at him; he can bear *to be hated and perſecuted, and have all manner of evil ſpoke againſt him* for *money ſake*: And in the purſuit of theſe deſigns, men will with great reſolution encounter enmity and oppoſition, and endure great ſufferings and perſecution. How many have been martyrs to their luſts, and have ſacrificed their eaſe and health, and even their lives, in the proſecution of their ambitious, and covetous, and voluptuous deſigns?

But, on the other hand, how eaſily are men checked and diverted from a good courſe, by the temptations and advantages of this world? how many are cold in their zeal for religion, by the favour and friendſhip of this world? And as their goods and eſtates have grown greater, their devotion hath grown leſs. How apt are they to be terrified at the apprehenſion of danger and ſufferings; and, by their fearful imaginations, to make them greater than they are, and with the people of *Iſrael*, to be diſheartned from all further attempts of entring *into the land of promiſe*, becauſe it is *full of giants, and the ſons of Anak?* How eaſily was Peter frighted into the denial of his maſter? And when our Saviour was apprehended, how did his diſciples forſake him, and fly from him? and though they were conſtant afterwards to the death, yet it was a great while before they were perfectly armed and ſteeled againſt the fear of ſuffering.

5thly, The men of the world will make all things ſtoop and ſubmit to that which is their great end and deſign; their end rules them and governs them, and gives laws to all their actions; they will make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not ſerve their end one way or other, they will have nothing to do with it. If an ambitious man ſeek wealth, it is but in order to his deſign to purchaſe friends, and ſtrengthen his intereſt, and to make his riſing the eaſier; he will lay his whole eſtate at the ſtake, rather than miſs of his end. The covetous man will quit his pleaſure, when it lies croſs to his intereſt; if he have any expenſive luſt and chargeable vice, he will turn it off, or exchange it for ſome more frugal and profitable ſin.

But in the affairs of religion, and the concernments of our ſouls, how frequently do men act without a due regard and conſideration of their great end? And inſtead of making other things ſubmit to it, they often bow and bend it to their inferior intereſt. They make heaven ſtoop to earth, and religion to ſerve a worldly deſign; and the glory of God to give way to gain, and the great concernments of their ſouls, and their eternal ſalvation, to their temporal profit and advantage. The men of the world are generally true to their great end, and pay it that reſpect which is due to it, and will ſuffer nothing to take place of it in their eſteem and affection; and if men were as wiſe for their ſouls and for another world, they would bring all things to their great end, and make all the concernments of this temporal life to yield and give way to the great concernments of their eternal happineſs. I proceed in the

Second place, to give ſome account of this, whence it comes to paſs, that *the children of this world are wiſer in their generation than the children of light*. And this I ſhall do, by conſidering what advantages *the children of this world* have as to the affairs of this world, above what good men have as to the concernments of another world. I ſhall inſtance in four or five of the chief.

1ſt, The things of this world are preſent and ſenſible, and becauſe of their nearneſs to us, are apt to ſtrike powerfully upon our ſenſes, and to affect us mightily, to excite our deſires after them, and to work ſtrongly upon our hopes and fears: but the things of another world being remote from us, are leſſened by their diſtance, and conſequently are not apt to work ſo powerfully upon our minds. They are inviſible to us, and only diſcerned by faith, which is a more obſcure and leſs certain perception of things, than we have of thoſe objects which are preſented to our bodily eyes. *The things which God hath prepared for them that love him*, the glory and happineſs of the next world, are *things which eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard. The children of light* do not ſee God, *as the children of this world* ſee *mammon.*

2dly, The ſenſual delights and enjoyments of this world, are better ſuited and more agreeable to the corrupt and degenerate nature of men, than ſpiritual and heavenly things are to thoſe that are regenerate. In this lapſed and degenerate ſtate of mankind, appetite and ſenſe are apt to prevail above reaſon; and therefore thoſe things which are moſt delightful to ſenſe, we favour and mind, and love to buſy our ſelves about them, becauſe they are moſt ſuitable to the animal life, which is the governing principle of corrupt nature.

And the reaſon of this is plain, becauſe that principle in worldly and ſenſual men, which purſues earthly things, is in thoſe who are unregenerate entire and undivided, and conſquently the affections and inclinations of the whole man, do all tend one way, and run out towards thoſe things in a full and undivided ſtream; whereas good men are but regenerate in part; and though they have a principle of ſpiritual life in them, yet their affections are divided, and there is a great ſtruggling and conflict between fleſh and ſpirit, and it is a great while before the ſpiritual principle doth clearly prevail, and get a perfect victory over our ſenſual appetites and inclinations. Mens affections to the world are entire and unbroken, and therefore they purſue theſe things with all their might; but the beſt men are but good in part, and that heavenly principle which is in them, is very much hindred in its operations by a contrary principle, our earthly and ſenſual inclinations, which are hardly ever perfectly ſubdued and brought under in this world.

3dly, The worldly man's faith and hope, and fear of preſent and ſenſible things, is commonly ſtronger than a good man's faith and hope, and fear of things future and eternal. Now, faith, and hope, and fear, are the great principles which govern and bear ſway in the actions and lives of men. If a man be once firmly perſuaded of the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and poſſeſſed with good hopes of obtaining it, and great fears and apprehenſions of the danger of miſſing it, this man may almoſt be put upon any thing. The merchant trafficks, and the huſbandman plows and ſows in faith and hope, becauſe he is convinced that bread is neceſſary to the ſupport of life, and hopes that God will ſo bleſs his labours, that he ſhall reap the fruit of them, and plainly ſees, that if he do not take this pains, he muſt ſtarve. But how few are there that believe, and hope, and fear concerning the things of another world, as *the children of this world* do concerning the things of this world! If any man aſk me, how I know this? I appeal to experience; it is plain and viſible in the lives and actions, and endeavours of men. Good men are ſeldom ſo effectually and throughly perſuaded of the principles of religion, and the truth of the ſayings contained in the holy ſcriptures, as the men of the world are of their own ſayings and proverbs. Men do not believe that *honeſty is the beſt policy*; or, as *Solomon* expreſſeth it, that *he that walketh uprightly, walketh ſurely*; as the men of the world believe their own Maxims, that *a man may be too honeſt to live*; that *plain-dealing is a jewel*; *but he that wears it, ſhall die a beggar*. Few mens hopes of heaven are ſo powerful and vigorous, and have ſo ſenſible an effect upon their lives, as the worldly man's hopes of gain and advantage. Men are not ſo afraid to ſwear, as they are to ſpeak treaſon; they are not ſo firmly perſuaded of the danger of ſin to their ſouls and bodies in another world, as of the danger to which ſome crimes againſt the laws of men do expoſe their temporal lives and ſafety; therefore they will many times venture to offend God, rather than incur the penalty of human laws.

4thly, The men of the world have but one deſign, and are wholly intent upon it, and this is a great advantage. He that hath but one thing to mind, may eaſily be ſkilled and excel in it. When a man makes one thing his whole buſineſs, no wonder if he be very knowing and wiſe in that. Now the men of the world mind worldly things, and have no care and concernment for any thing elſe. It is a ſaying, I think of *Thomas Aquinas*, *Cave ab illo qui unicum legit librum*: *He is a dangerous man that reads but one book*; he that gives his mind but to one thing, muſt needs be too hard for any man at that. Application to one thing, eſpecially in matters of practice, gains a man perfect experience in it, and experience furniſheth him with obſervations about it, and theſe make him wiſe and prudent in that thing.

But good men, though they have a great affection for heaven and heavenly things, yet the buſineſs and neceſſities of this life, do very much divert and take them off from the care of better things; they are divided between the concernments of this life and the other, and though there be but *one thing neceſſary* in compariſon, yet the conveniencies of this life are to be regarded; and though our ſouls be our main care, yet ſome conſideration muſt be had of our bodies, that they may be fit for the ſervice of our ſouls; ſome proviſion muſt be made for their preſent ſupport, ſo long as we continue in theſe earthly tabernacles; and this will neceſſarily engage us in the world, ſo that we cannot always and wholly apply ourſelves to heavenly things, and mind them as the men of the world do the things of this world.

5thly, and *laſtly*, The men of the world have a greater compaſs and liberty in the purſuit of their worldly deſigns, than good men have in the proſecution of *their* intereſts. The *children of light* are limited and confined to the uſe of lawful means, for the compaſſing of their ends; but the men of the world are not ſo ſtrait-laced, *quocunque modo rem*; they are reſolved upon the point, and will ſtick at no means to compaſs their end. They do not ſtand upon the nice diſtinctions of good and evil, of right and wrong, invented by ſpeculative and ſcrupulous men, to puzzle buſineſs, and to hinder and diſappoint great deſigns. If *Ahab* have a mind to *Naboth*'s vineyard, and *Naboth* will not let him be honeſt, and have it for a valuable conſideration, he will try to get it a cheaper way; *Naboth* ſhall by falſe witneſs be made a traytor, and his vineyard by this means ſhall be forfeited to him. And thus the unjuſt ſteward in the parable provided for himſelf; he wronged his Lord, to ſecure a retreat to himſelf in the time of his diſtreſs.

The *third* and *laſt* thing only remains, to make ſome inferences from what hath been ſaid by way of application. And,

I. Notwithſtanding the commendation which hath been given of the wiſdom of this world, yet upon the whole matter it is not much to be valued and admired. It is indeed great in its way and kind; but it is applied to little and low purpoſes, employed about the concernments of a ſhort time and a few days, about the worſt and meaneſt part of our ſelves, and accompanied with the neglect of greater and better things, ſuch as concern our ſouls, and our whole duration, even our happineſs to all eternity. And therefore that which the world admires and cries up for wiſdom, is in the eſteem of God, who judgeth of things according to truth, but vanity and folly. *The wiſdom of the world* (ſaith St. *Paul*) *is fooliſhneſs with God.* The rich man in the parable, who encreaſed his goods, and enlarged his barns, and laid up for many years, did applaud himſelf, and was, no doubt, applauded by others for a very wiſe man: but becauſe *he laid up treaſure for himſelf, and was not rich toward God*, that is, did not employ his eſtate to good and charitable purpoſes, therefore God, who calls no body out of his right name, calls this man *fool; thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be taken from thee, and then whoſe ſhall all theſe things be?* And our Saviour here in the text, while he commends the *wiſdom of the children of this world*, he adds that which is a conſiderable blemiſh and abatement to it, *The children of this world are wiſer*, εἰς τὴν γενεὰν τῶν ἑαυτῶν, *for their age*, for the concernments of this preſent life; but this is but a ſhort and purblind wiſdom, which ſees but a little way, and conſiders only things preſent and near at hand; whereas true wiſdom hath a larger and farther proſpect, and regards the future as well as the preſent, and takes care to provide for it. Nay, our Saviour gives the wiſdom of this world its utmoſt due, when he ſays, *The children of this world are wiſer for their generation*; for this is the very beſt that can be ſaid of it, it ſeldom looks ſo far, and holds out ſo long. Many men have ſurvived their own projects, and have lived to ſee the folly and ill fate of their covetous and ambitious deſigns. So the prophet tells us, *Jer.* xvii. 11. *As the partridge ſitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; ſo he that getteth riches, and not by right, ſhall leave them in the midſt of his days, and at his end ſhall be a fool.*

This is wiſdom, to regard our main intereſt; but if we be wrong in our end, (as all worldly men are) the faſter and farther we go, the more fatal is our error and miſtake. *The children of this world* are out in their end, and miſtaken in the main; they are wiſe for this world, which is inconſiderable to eternity; wiſe for a little while, and fools for ever.

2dly, From what hath been ſaid, we may infer, that if we loſe our ſouls, and come ſhort of eternal happineſs, it is through our own fault and groſs neglect; for we ſee that men are wiſe enough for this world; and the ſame prudence, and care, and diligence applied to the concernments of our ſouls, would infallibly make us happy. Nay, our Saviour here in the text tells us, that uſually leſs wiſdom and induſtry than the men of this world uſe about the things of this world, is exerciſed by *the children of light*, who yet at laſt, through the mercy of God, do attain eternal life.

So that it is very plain, that if men would but take that care for their immortal ſouls, which they generally do for their frail and dying bodies, and be as heartily concerned for the unſeen world, and for eternity, as they are for things viſible and temporal, they would with much more certainty gain heaven, than any man can obtain worldly riches and honours. And can we in conſcience deſire more than to be happy for ever, upon as eaſy and upon more certain terms than any man can be rich or great in this world? For we may miſs of theſe things after all our travail and pains about them; or if we get them, we may loſe them again: But if we *ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs*; if we be ſincerely good, we are ſure to have the reward of it, even that *eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed*; if we *lay up for our ſelves treaſures in heaven*, they will be ſafe and ſecure there, where *no moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and ſteal.*

If we would ſeriouſly think of the other world, and were thoroughly poſſeſt with a firm belief of the eternity of that happineſs or miſery, which remains for men after this life, we ſhould pray to God and hear his word, and perform all the duties of religion with the ſame care and concernment, with the ſame fervour and intention of mind, as men proſecute their worldly buſineſs. Were we fully perſuaded of the unſeen glories and torments of the other world, we ſhould be much more affected with them, than with all the temptations and terrors of ſenſe; becauſe in reaſon they are much more conſiderable. The diſgrace of the pillory will fright men from perjury; and will not everlaſting ſhame and confuſion? The fear of death will deter many men from robbing and ſtealing, who would perhaps venture upon theſe crimes, if there were no danger in them; and will not the horrors of the *ſecond death*, of the *worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched*, have as great an awe and influence upon us? If they have not, it is a ſign that we do not equally believe the danger of human laws, and the damnation of hell.

Surely men have not the ſame belief of heaven, and affection for it, that they have for this world. If they had, their care and diligence about theſe things would be more equal. For we are not ſo weak as we make our ſelves; we are not yet ſo degenerate, but if we would ſet our ſelves ſeriouſly to it, and earneſtly beg the aſſiſtance of God's grace, we might come to know our duty, and our wills might be engaged to follow the directions of our underſtandings, and our affections to obey the command of our wills, and our actions to follow the impulſe of our affections. Much of this is naturally in our power; and what is wanting, the grace of God is ready to ſupply. We can go to church, and we can hear the word of God, and we can conſider what we hear; we can pray to God, and ſay, *we believe, Lord help our unbelief*, and enable us to do what thou requireſt of us; and we can forbear a great many ſins, which we raſhly and wilfully run into: A great preſent danger will fright us from ſin, a terrible ſtorm will drive us to our devotion, and teach us to pray; a ſharp fit of the gout will take a man off from drinking; the eye of a maſter or magiſtrate will reſtrain men from many things, which they ſay they cannot forbear. So that we do but counterfeit, and make our ſelves more cripples than we are, that we may be pitied: for if fear will reſtrain us, it is a ſign that we can forbear; if *the rod of affliction will fetch it out* of us, and make us do that which at other times we ſay we are unable to do, this is a demonſtration that it is in us, and that the thing is in our power.

It is true, we can do nothing that is good without the aſſiſtance of God's grace; but that aſſiſtance which we may have for aſking, is in effect in our own power. So that if the matter were ſearched to the bottom, it is not want of power that hinders us from doing our duty, but ſloth and negligence; for God hath *given us exceeding great and precious promiſes, whereby we may be made partakers of a divine nature*; and by virtue whereof, if we be not wanting to our ſelves, we may *cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God*.

3*dly* and *laſtly*, What a ſhame and reproach is this to *the children of light*! Our Saviour ſpeaks this by way of upbraiding, as we may judge by the terms of compariſon which he uſeth, that *the children of this world* ſhould be wiſer *than the children of light*, that is, than *wiſdom's own children*; and that they ſhould be *wiſer in their generation*, that is, for the concernments of a ſhort and inconſiderable time, than the others are for all eternity.

How ſhould it make our blood to riſe in our faces, and fill us with confuſion, that the men of this world ſhould be more prudent and ſkilful in the contrivance and management of their little affairs; more reſolute and vigorous in the proſecution of them, than we are about the everlaſting concernments of our ſouls! That a worldly church ſhould uſe wiſer and more effectual means to promote and uphold ignorance, and error, and ſuperſtition, than we do to build up the true church of Chriſt in knowledge, and faith, and charity! That the men of the world ſhould toil and take more pains for *the deceitful riches*, than we do for *the true*; and be contented to hazard more for *a corruptible crown*, than we for *an incorruptible*! That they ſhould love pleaſure more than we do God, and mind their bodies and temporal eſtates more than we do our ſouls and our eternal happineſs!

Do but obſerve the men of the world, what a pace they go, what large and nimble ſteps they take in the purſuit of earthly things; they do not ſeek riches *as if they ſought them not*, and love the world *as if they loved it not*, and enjoy the preſent delights of this world, *as if they poſſeſſed them not*; though *the faſhion of this world paſſeth away*: but we ſeek heaven, *as if we ſought it not*, and love God *as if we*

5

loved him not, and mind eternity and the world to come, *as if we minded them not*; and yet *the faſhion of* that *world doth not paſs away*.

But to all this it may be ſaid, you have already told us, that *the children of this world* have ſo many advantages above *the children of light*, that it is no wonder if they excel and outſtrip them: And it is very true, that in many reſpects they have the advantage of them. But if *the children of light* would look about them, and take all things into conſideration, they might ſee ſomething very conſiderable to balance the advantages on the other ſide. It is true, the things of this world are preſent and ſenſible; but ſo long as we have ſufficient aſſurance of the reality of a ſuture ſtate, and of the rewards and puniſhments of it, the greatneſs and eternity of theſe is ſuch an amazing conſideration, that no diſtance can render them inconſiderable to a prudent and thinking man. And though the men of the world have an entire principle, which is not divided between God and the world; whereas in good men there is a great conflict of contrary principles, the fleſh and ſpirit: yet this diſadvantage is likewiſe balanced by that powerful aſſiſtance of God's grace, which is promiſed to all good men, who heartily beg it of him, and are ſincerely reſolved to make uſe of it. And *laſtly*, though the men of the world have many ways to compaſs their ends, yet *the children of light* have one great and infallible one. All the means which the men of the world uſe to accompliſh their deſigns, may fail and miſcarry; for *the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battel to the ſtrong, nor yet bread to the wiſe, nor riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of ſkill; but time and chance happen to all:* but he that ſincerely ſerves God, and uſeth the means for the attaining of everlaſting ſalvation, is ſure to attain it; if we *ſeek the righteouſneſs of God* as we ought, we ſhall certainly be *admitted into his kingdom*. And this ſurely is an unſpeakable advantage, which *the children of light* have above *the children of this world*, that if we faithfully uſe the means, we cannot fail of the end; *if we have our fruit unto holineſs, our end ſhall be everlaſting life*; which God of his infinite goodneſs grant to us all, for his mercies ſake.

SERMON LXXVI.

Concerning the Perfection of GOD.

MATT. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

THESE words are the concluſion which our Saviour draws from thoſe precepts which he had given his diſciples of *greater perfection*, than any laws that were extant in the world before, *ver.* 44. *I ſay unto you, love your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for thoſe that deſpitefully uſe you and perſecute you*. And to perſuade them hereto, he propounds to them the pattern of the *divine perfection*; telling them, that being thus affected towards their enemies, they ſhould reſemble God, *ver.* 45. *That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father; for he maketh the ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good; and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt.*

And then he tells us, that if we be not thus affected towards our enemies, and thoſe that have been injurious to us, we are ſo far from being like God, that we are but juſt level with the worſt of men, *ver.* 46, 47. *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you; do not even the publicans the ſame? And if ye ſalute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans ſo?* And then concludes, that if we would attain that *perfection* which the chriſtian religion deſigns to advance men to, we muſt endeavour to be like God in theſe *perfections* of goodneſs and mercy, and patience; *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* In which words we have.

Firſt, The abſolute *perfection* of the divine nature ſuppoſed: *As your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Secondly, It is propounded as a pattern to our imitation: *Be ye therefore perfect*, &c.

In handling of theſe words I ſhall do theſe *four* things.

I. Conſider how we are to conceive of the *divine perfection.*

II. I ſhall lay down ſome rules whereby we may govern and rectify our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God.

III. How far we are to imitate the *perfections* of God, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more eſpecially propound to our imitation.

IV. I ſhall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to ſhew that the duty here intended by our Saviour is not impoſſible to us; and then conclude this diſcourſe with ſome uſeful inferences from the whole.

I. I ſhall conſider how we are to conceive of the *divine perfections:* Theſe *two* ways,

1. By aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible *perfection* to God.

2. By ſeparating and removing all manner of *imperfection* from him.

1. By aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible *perfection* to God; abſolute and univerſal *perfection*, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particulars; but whatever, we can conceive and imagine to be a *perfection*, is to be aſcribed to him; yea, and beyond this, whatever poſſible *perfection* there is, or poſſible degree of any *perfection*, which our ſhort underſtandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be aſcribed to him. For we are not to confine the *perfection* of God to our imagination, as *if we could find out the Almighty to perfection:* But, on the contrary, to believe the *perfection* of the divine nature to be boundleſs and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our higheſt thoughts and apprehenſions.

More particularly, all kinds and all degrees of *perfection* are to be aſcribed to God, which either do not imply a plain contradiction, or do not argue ſome *imperfection*, or are not evidently inconſiſtent with ſome other and greater *perfection.*

Some things may ſeem to be *perfections*, which in truth are not, becauſe they are plainly impoſſible, and involve a contradiction: as that what has once been, ſhould by any power be made not to have been; or that any thing, which by its nature is limited and confined to one place, ſhould at the ſame time be in another. Theſe things in reaſon are impoſſible, and therefore not to be ſuppoſed to fall under any power how unlimited ſoever. For if we once aſcribe contradictions to God, we deſtroy his being; becauſe then to be, and not to be, power, and no power, would be all one.

And then there are ſome *perfections*, which do argue and ſuppoſe imperfections in them; as motion, the quickneſs and ſwiftneſs whereof in creatures is a *perfection*, but then it ſuppoſeth a finite and limited nature: For a boundleſs and immenſe being, that is every where preſent at once, hath no need to move from one place to another; and therefore, though motion be a *perfection* in creatures, there is no reaſon to aſcribe it to God, becauſe it ſuppoſeth a greater *imperfection.*

And there are alſo ſome imaginable degrees of *perfection*, which, becauſe they are inconſiſtent with other *perfections*, are not to be admitted in the divine nature. For inſtance, ſuch degrees of goodneſs and mercy may be imagined, as would quite exclude and ſhut out juſtice; and on the other hand, ſuch a ſtrictneſs and a rigor of juſtice, as would leave no room at all for patience and mercy; and therefore ſuch degrees are not really to be eſteemed *perfections.* For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a divine *perfection*, which evidently claſheth with any other neceſſary and eſſential *perfection* of the divine nature. We muſt ſo conſider the *perfections* of God, that they may accord and conſiſt together; and therefore it cannot be a *perfection* of God to be ſo good and gracious as to encourage ſin, and to overthrow the reverence of his own laws and government. It is not goodneſs, but eaſineſs and weakneſs, to be contented to be perpetually injured and affronted. It is not patience to be willing to be everlaſtingly trampled upon. So likewiſe on the other hand, it is not a *perfection* to be ſo ſevere and rigorous, as to ſmite a ſinner in the inſtant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from puniſhment, and to give time for repentance.

But whatever *perfection* is conceivable or poſſible, and argues no *imperfection*, nor is repugnant to any other neceſſary *perfection*, is to be aſcribed to God; for this is the moſt natural and eaſy conception that we can have of God, that he is the moſt *perfect* being. This natural light doth firſt ſuggeſt and offer to the minds of men, and we cannot conceive of God as meer power and will, without wiſdom and goodneſs. Hence it is that the *Greeks* call God very often τὸ Κρείττον, *the beſt of beings:* and the Latin, *Optimus Maximus, the beſt and the greateſt, beatiſſima & perfectiſſima natura conſtans, & perfecta ratio, The happieſt and moſt perfect nature, immutable and abſolute reaſon*; and many other ſuch expreſſions which we meet with in the writings of the heathen philoſophers. I readily grant, that the firſt and moſt obvious thought which men have of God, is that of his greatneſs and majeſty; but this neceſſarily involves or infers his goodneſs; as *Seneca* excellently reaſons, *Primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere, dein reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine quâ nulla majeſtas*; "The firſt worſhip of the gods, is to believe their being, next to aſcribe to them greatneſs and majeſty, to aſcribe to them goodneſs, without which there can be no majeſty."

And we ſhall find all along in *Plato* and *Tully*, and the beſt and wiſeſt writers among the heathens, that they every where attribute the higheſt excellencies and *perfections* to the divine nature, and do ſteer and govern all their diſcourſes of God by this principle, that *perfection* is to be aſcribed to him: And whenever any thing is ſaid of God, they examine whether it be a *perfection* or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aſide, as a thing not fit to be ſpoken of him.

And in the ſcripture we do every where find *perfection* aſcribed to the nature and works and laws of God, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him. Job xxxvii. 16. *Doſt thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?* And again, *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* Pſal. xviii. 30. *As for God, his way is perfect,* Pſal. xix. 7. *The law of the Lord is perfect.*

I ſhall not need to conſider particularly the ſeveral *perfections* of the divine nature; I ſhall only give you a brief ſcheme and draught of them. Whatever *perfection* can be imagined either in the manner of being or acting, is to be aſcribed to God; therefore, as to his nature, we ſay that he is a ſpirit, that is, that he is not meer body or matter, becauſe that would exclude ſeveral other *perfections*; for meer matter is incapable both of knowledge and liberty, being determined by neceſſary laws and motions; and yet without knowledge and liberty, there can be no wiſdom nor goodneſs. We ſay of God, that he is of himſelf, and without cauſe, and does not owe his being to any other; and conſequently that he is neceſſarily, and that he cannot but *be*, and cannot be otherwiſe than he is; for that which is of it ſelf, did not chuſe whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwiſe; for to ſuppoſe any thing to deliberate or conſult about its own being, is to ſuppoſe it to be before it is.

We muſt ſay of God likewiſe, that he is immenſe, and every where preſent, becauſe to be limited is an *imperfection*; and that he is eternal, that is, ever was, and ſhall be; for to ceaſe to be, is a greater *imperfection* than ſometime not to have been.

And then we are to ſay of God, that he is the cauſe of all other beings; that they are made by him, and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the moſt perfect manner, by a glance of his mind, and by the meer beck and nod of his will, without long ſtudy or deliberation, without laborious pains and endeavours, and conſequently that nothing is exempted from his knowledge, and power, and providence, and that he adminiſters all things in a way of goodneſs and wiſdom, of juſtice and truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their laſt end. All theſe *perfections*, and all other that are poſſible, we are to look upon the divine nature as fully and immutably poſſeſt of, and that in an higher and more excellent degree than our finite underſtandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to aſcribe all imaginable poſſible *perfections* to God, ſo we are to ſeparate and remove all manner of *imperfection* from him. We muſt not obſcure

or blemiſh the divine nature with the leaſt ſhadow or blot of *imperfection*. If we once admit of this, to aſcribe any thing to God which argues *imperfection*, we ſtrike at the foundation, and deſtroy one of the cleareſt and moſt eſſential notions which men have of God. And therefore we find the ſcripture very careful to remove all kinds of natural or moral *imperfection* from God. *Gen.* xviii. 25. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous ſhall be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the world do right?* Deut. xxxii. 4, *A God of truth and without iniquity.* Rom. ix. 14. *What ſhall we ſay then, is there unrighteouſneſs with God? God forbid*, far be it from him.

Hence it is that ſcripture-holineſs is ſo frequently aſcribed to God, which ſignifies the purity and freedom of the divine nature from that which we call ſin; and God is very ſolicitous to give us ſuch a notion of himſelf, as may remove ſin; and unrighteouſneſs at the greateſt diſtance from him, becauſe that is the greateſt of *imperfections*. Is it an *imperfection* to countenance ſin? The ſcripture acquits God of it, *Pſal.* v. 4, 5. *Thou art not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with thee.* Is it an *imperfection* to go from ones word, or to change ones mind? This likewiſe is removed from God, 1 *Sam.* xv. 29. *The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie nor repent: He is not a man, that he ſhould repent.* Is it an *imperfection* to want any thing, to be liable to any thing, to depend upon any thing without ones ſelf for their happineſs? This alſo is to be ſet far from him. *Job* xxii. 2, 3. *Can a man be profitable to God? Or is it a gain to him, that thou makeſt thy way perfect?* Job xxxv. 6, 7. *If thou ſinneſt, what doſt thou againſt him? Or if thy tranſgreſſions be multiplied, what doſt thou unto him? if thou art righteous, what giveſt thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedneſs may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteouſneſs may profit the ſon of man.* Is it an *imperfection* to tempt, or to be tempted to ſin? This is to be ſeparated from God; *He cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man*, ſaith St. *James*, chap. i. 17. And to mention no more, is it an *imperfection* to be in any reſpect mutable? This is denied of God. *With him there is no variableneſs, or ſhadow of turning.* Thus you ſee how we are to conceive of the *perfections* of God, by aſcribing all imaginable and poſſible *perfection* to him, and removing all ſhadow of *imperfection* from him. I proceed in the

II. Place to lay down ſome rules by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God: The beſt I can think of, are theſe following.

Firſt, Let us begin with the moſt natural, and plain, and eaſy *perfections* of God, and lay them for a foundation, and rectify all our other apprehenſions of God, and reaſonings about him, by theſe; and theſe are his power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, to which moſt of the reſt may be reduced. Right apprehenſions, and a firm belief of theſe will make it eaſily credible to us, that all things were made and are governed by him; for his goodneſs will diſpoſe and incline him to communicate being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. An infinite power and wiſdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any diſturbance of his eaſe or happineſs, as *Epicurus* would ſeem vainly to fear; who in truth did not believe a god, but pretended only to deny his providence, and that he either made or governed the world, becauſe he was loth to lay ſo much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if thoſe things which are impoſſible and difficult to our weakneſs and folly, might not be infinitely eaſy to infinite power and wiſdom.

Particularly the goodneſs and juſtice of God are not ſo difficult to apprehend, as the diſputes and controverſies about them have rendered them to many. When we conſider infinite knowledge and power, we may eaſily loſe our ſelves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them: There is ſomething concerning theſe, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our reaſon; we may not be able to underſtand how ſomething may be produced from nothing, becauſe it argues ſuch an exceſs of power, as we cannot comprehend; but yet we are forced to acknowledge, that either the world muſt be produced from nothing, or that matter was eternally of it ſelf, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite power ſhould be able to produce it from nothing. So likewiſe we are not able to conceive, how God can certainly know future events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain cauſes, becauſe we cannot comprehend infinite knowledge; but this we may eaſily be ſatisfied in, that infinite power and knowledge may be able to do, and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a child can imagine how a great mathematician can demonſtrate his propoſitions. Only this we are ſure of, as we can be of any thing, that no power can do that which is evidently impoſſible, and implies a plain contradiction.

We are not able perhaps to reconcile the particular providences of God with his univerſal goodneſs, juſtice and wiſdom, becauſe we cannot ſee to the end of his ways and works at one view, and ſee every part with relation to the whole; which would appear very wiſe, if we knew the whole ſeries of things, and ſaw the entire deſign together, as God himſelf does, to whom (as *Solomon* tells us) *all his ways are known from the beginning*.

So that however we may be at a loſs in our conceptions of God's infinite knowledge and power, yet goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, are notions eaſy and familiar; and if we could not underſtand theſe, the whole bible would be inſignificant to us. For all revelation from God ſuppoſeth us to know what is meant by goodneſs, juſtice, and truth: And therefore no man can entertain any notion of God, which plainly contradicts theſe. And it is fooliſh for any man to pretend, that he cannot know what goodneſs and juſtice, and truth in God are: For if we do not know this, 'tis all one to us, whether God be good or not, nor could we imitate his goodneſs; for he that imitates, endeavours to make himſelf like ſomething that he knows, and muſt of neceſſity have ſome idea of that to which he aims to be like: So that if we had no certain and ſettled notion of the goodneſs and juſtice, and truth of God, he would be altogether an unintelligible being; and religion, which conſiſts in the imitation of him, would be utterly impoſſible.

Now theſe being the moſt eaſy and intelligible *perfections* of God, by which he is ſaid in ſcripture to declare his name, that is, to make himſelf known to us, we ſhould govern all our reaſonings about God (as concerning his decrees, and his concurrence with the free actions of men, and his particular providence, which are things more dark and obſcure) by what is more clear; and we ſhall find in ſcripture, that in all theſe points holy men do conſtantly appeal to theſe unqueſtionable and intelligible *perfections* of God. *Wilt thou deſtroy the righteous with the wicked?* (ſaith *Abraham*) *That be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the world do right?* We may be miſtaken; but God certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous; and he knows how to puniſh the wicked, and ſave the righteous: But we cannot be miſtaken in this principle, *that the Judge of all the world will do right*. Thus *Moſes* ſatisfies himſelf and others, concerning the particular providences of God towards the people of *Iſrael*. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4. *I will publiſh the name of the Lord: All his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, juſt and right is he.* This we certainly know of God. So St. *Paul*, *Rom.* ii. 2. *Thou art inexcuſable, O man!* Whatſoever excuſe men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a principle, *We are ſure the judgment of God is according to truth.*

Secondly, Let us always conſider the *perfections* of God in conjunction, and ſo as to reconcile them with one another. Do not conſider God as meer power and ſovereignty, as meer mercy and goodneſs, as meer juſtice and ſeverity; but as all theſe together, and in ſuch a meaſure and degree, as may make them conſiſtent with one another. The greateſt miſtakes in religion are certainly ſprung from this root, from ſeparating the *perfections* of God, and conſidering them ſingly, and framing ſuch wide and large notions of one, as to exclude another; whereas the *perfections* of God agree together, and that is not a divine *perfection* which contradicts any other perfection. Among men indeed an eminent degree of any one excellency does uſually ſhut out ſome other; and therefore it is obſerved, that power and moderation, love and diſcretion, do not often meet together; that a great memory and a ſmall judgment, a good wit and an ill nature, are many times found in conjunction. But in infinite *perfection* all *perfections* do eminently meet and conſiſt together; and it is not neceſſary that one excellency ſhould be raiſed upon the ruins of another.

And if this had been well conſidered, men would not, by being too intent upon God's Sovereignty, with neglect of his other *perfections*, have ſpoken thoſe hard things about predeſtination: for the ſovereignty of God doth by no means ſet him above the eternal laws of goodneſs, and truth, and righteouſneſs. And if this were conſidered, men would not, by poring upon the juſtice and ſeverity of God, be ſo ſwallowed up in deſpair: for God is not ſo ſevere, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning ſinner. If this were well conſidered, it would check the preſumption of thoſe who encourage themſelves in ſin, by fancying to themſelves a God of all mercy and goodneſs; and *becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not ſpeedily executed, therefore their heart is fully ſet in them to do evil:* For it is not goodneſs and mercy finally to bear with and forgive obſtinate offenders, but want of prudence and good government.

Thirdly, Among different opinions concerning God (as there always have been and will be in the world) chuſe thoſe which are fartheſt from extremity; becauſe truth as well as virtue uſually lies between the extreams. And here I will inſtance in that controverſy, which has much diſquieted the church almoſt in all ages, concerning the decrees of God; about which there are two extreams, the one that God peremptorily decrees the final condition of every particular perſon, that is, their everlaſting happineſs or miſery, without any regard or conſideration of the *good* or *bad* actions of men. The other that God decrees nothing concerning any particular perſon, but only in general, that men found under ſuch and ſuch qualifications ſhall be happy or miſerable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themſelves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man muſt be that underſtands the difficulties on both ſides, had beſt take up in the middle opinion, that God decrees the final condition of particular perſons with reſpect to certain qualifications, which, ſpeaking abſolutely, are not in every man's power, but yet under the influence of God's grace, which is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours of men, may be ſaid to be in our power, in the ſame ſenſe as St. *Paul* ſays, *I am able to do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthening me:* For beſides, that this in all probability is the truth, there will be this advantage in it, that he that ſtands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the diſſenters on both ſides, than either of them will be to one another: becauſe the middle is not ſo far from either extream, as the extreams are from one another: At the worſt, he ſtands faireſt for an impartial enquiry after truth, and when he has ſatisfied himſelf where the truth lies, he may more ſilently paſs over to it, without any great imputation of inconſiſtency; which cannot but be remarkable in him, who paſſeth from one extream to another.

Fourthly and *laſtly*, Entertain no opinion concerning God, that doth evidently contradict the practice of religion, and a good life, though never ſo ſpecious and ſubtil arguments may be uſed to perſuade it. Truth is moſt eaſily ſeen and diſcerned in thoſe reaſonings and opinions which tend to practice; becauſe the abſurdity and inconvenience of them is ſooneſt diſcovered: whereas we cannot ſo certainly find out the truth or falſhood of thoſe opinions, which ſpeculative men deviſe in their ſtudies, without any conſideration whether they ſerve any real purpoſe of life or not. Men indeed are very apt to form thoſe notions, which are moſt remote from common ſenſe and uſe; becauſe more pains and wit are required to make them plauſible: but there needs no other argument to make a wiſe man deſpiſe them, than that they are unprofitable, and ſignify nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better.

This is univerſally true in all kind of knowledge, but moſt conſiderable in the knowledge of God and religion; becauſe that knowledge is of the greateſt conſideration. We need not ſcruple to admit ſome things, not ſo evident to natural reaſon, if we be ſatisfied of the truth of them from an higher and more cogent reaſon: As that God has revealed it, and ſaid it; this general reaſon may perſuade us of a thing that is above and beyond natural reaſon: But we may not admit any thing for a divine revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of an holy life; becauſe this is the main end of all divine revelation; and we know God, only in order to the ſervice and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge that contradicts practice, as vain and falſe, becauſe it deſtroys its end. There are many things that ſeem probable enough in ſpeculation, which yet we moſt pertinaciouſly deny, becauſe they are not practicable; and there are many things which ſeem doubtful in ſpeculation, and would admit of great diſpute, which yet becauſe they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unqueſtionable. The ἀργὸς λόγος, the idle reaſoning of the *Stoicks*, was a thing contemned by the wiſer philoſophers, as vain and uſeleſs ſubtilty. *Zeno* pretends to demonſtrate there is no motion; and what is the conſequence of this ſpeculation, but that men muſt ſtand ſtill? But ſo long as a man finds he can walk, all the ſophiſtry in the world will not perſuade him that motion is impoſſible. In like manner, they that would perſuade us that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own ſanctification than ſtocks or ſtones, and upon ſcripture-metaphors miſunderſtood, (as *our being dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, and *created to good works*) graft notions, which are impoſſible and abſurd in practice, do not conſider that the natural conſequence of this is, that men muſt do nothing at all in religion, never think of God, nor pray to him, nor read his word, nor go to church, but ſit ſtill and be wholly paſſive to the operations of God's grace. But however this may ſeem plauſible, and men may think they add much to the glory of God's grace, while they deny any power in the creature; yet every conſiderate man will preſently apprehend that this is by no means to be admitted, becauſe it contradicts practice, and makes all the commands and exhortations of God's word vain and to no purpoſe, becauſe it deſtroys religion, and diſcourages the endeavours of men; makes them ſlothful and careleſs of *working out their own ſalvation*, than which nothing can ſet a man farther from God's grace and aſſiſtance, and more immediately diſpoſe him for ruin; and upon ſome ſuch falſe reaſoning as this, the *ſlothful ſervant* in the parable *hid his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth*; but when he was called to account, his excuſe was not admitted, but *he was caſt into utter darkneſs*. The two other particulars, namely, how far we are to imitate the divine *perfections*, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more eſpecially propound to our imitation, and likewiſe to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to ſhew that the duty here enjoined, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*, is not impoſſible to us: Both theſe I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

4

SERMON

SERMON LXXVII.

Concerning our Imitation of the DIVINE PERFECTIONS.

MATTH. V. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

IN theſe words we have, *Firſt*, The abſolute *perfection* of the divine nature ſuppoſed, not only in thoſe before-mentioned, of goodneſs, and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellencies whatſoever.

Secondly, The *perfection* of God, is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of theſe two particulars, I propounded to proceed in this method:

I. To ſhew how we are to conceive of the divine *perfection*.

II. To lay down ſome rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God.

III. To ſhew how far we are to imitate the *perfections* of God, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more-eſpecially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to ſhew that the duty here intended by our Saviour, is not impoſſible to us: and then to draw ſome uſeful inferences from the whole.

The *two* firſt I have already ſpoken to. I now proceed to the *third* particular, which is, To ſhew how far we are to imitate the *perfections* of God, and particularly what thoſe divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more-eſpecially propound to our imitation. For though theſe words do ſuppoſe the abſolute *perfections* of God, which are incommunicable, and a creature, as ſuch, is utterly incapable of them, theſe cannot be ſuppoſed to be intended for a pattern to us. As the neceſſity and independency of the divine nature; and the ſelf-ſufficiency of it to his own happineſs; to be the original cauſe of all things; and conſequently ſupreme Lord and Governor; the immenſity and eternity of his being; theſe, and perhaps ſeveral other *perfections*, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an unſufferable pride, and a kind of high treaſon againſt the divine Majeſty, and a ſottiſh ignorance of the neceſſary bounds and limits of our own ſtate, as we are creatures, to think to reſemble God in theſe excellencies, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the ſin of *Lucifer*; an ambition to ſtep into the throne of God, and *to be like the moſt High*.

So that, in our imitation of the divine *perfection*, we are to keep within the ſtation of creatures, not affecting an independency and ſovereignty like the moſt High, and to be omnipotent as he is, *to have an arm like God, and to thunder with a voice like him*, as the expreſſion is in *Job*; but to endeavour to reſemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ*, according to the rate and capacity of a creature, in thoſe divine qualities, and in ſuch meaſures and degrees, as our finite and dependent nature is capable of,

More-eſpecially and chiefly in the moral *perfections* of the divine nature, ſuch as are his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, his juſtice, and truth, and faithfulneſs; theſe, and only theſe, the ſcripture ſeems to comprehend under the name of *holi-*

neſs; not all the excellencies of the divine nature in general, but thoſe which we call moral excellencies and perfections, ſuch as thoſe which I have named; for with theſe, and hardly with any other, is the holineſs of God joined in ſcripture, as *holy and righteous, holy and true*, &c. And therefore when God ſays, *Be ye holy, for I am holy*; it ſignifies, that we are to imitate God in his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and righteouſneſs, and faithfulneſs, and truth; for theſe are the holineſs of the divine nature, which ſet him at the greateſt diſtance from that which we call moral impurity and ſin.

For that which our Saviour, here in the text, more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodneſs of God, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of God, is his goodneſs to thoſe that are in miſery, or are liable to it. The patience of God, is his mercy in ſparing thoſe who have deſerved puniſhment, and are liable to it. And the goodneſs of God is then greateſt, when it is exerciſed towards the evil and unthankful; thoſe who are ſo far from deſerving it, that they have given great and juſt provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is ſo remarkable in God towards the unworthy and unthankful ſons of men, our Saviour recommends to our imitation, here in the text, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Be ye therefore* —— this Particle of inference *therefore*, hath a plain relation to ſomething ſpoken before; and if we look back to *ver.* 44. we ſhall find our Saviour there enjoining his diſciples *to love their enemies*; *to bleſs them that curſe them*; *to do good to them that hate them*; *and to pray for thoſe that deſpitefully uſe them, and perſecute them.* And by what other argument doth he inforce the practice of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like God, to be good to the evil and unthankful, *ver.* 45. *That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the juſt and on the unjuſt.* God is good to all, and exerciſeth great mercy and patience even towards the evil and unjuſt. And then he concludes. that if *perfection* itſelf be fit to be a pattern, we ſhould labour after theſe qualities; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* So that though the univerſal perfection of the divine nature be here ſuppoſed, yet the attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our pattern; and the precept of imitating the divine *perfection* is more eſpecially to be underſtood of thoſe *perfections* which our Saviour had been diſcourſing of before, *viz.* the goodneſs and mercy of God. And that this is undoubtedly ſo, is evident from St. *Luke*'s rendering this precept, *chap.* vi. 36. *Be ye therefore* οικτίρμονες, benefici, *ready to do good, full of kindneſs and benignity*; *merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful*; that is, Endeavour you to be ſuch as I have deſcribed God to be. And this St. *Matthew* calls *perfection:* becauſe the goodneſs of God, is his great perfection; and the glory of the divine nature, that which reflects a luſtre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what thoſe perfections of the divine nature are, which our Saviour doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now, in the

Fourth and *laſt* place, To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to ſhew, that the duty here required, and intended by our Saviour, (when he ſays, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect)* is not impoſſible to us. And to this purpoſe, be pleaſed to conſider theſe *three* or *four* things.

1. That our imitation of God, is certainly reſtrained to the communicable perfections of God, and ſuch as creatures are capable of; as I have ſhewn before. For it is ſo far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like God in his peculiar perfections, that it was, probably, the ſin of the apoſtate angels.

2. Our imitation of the divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewiſe to be reſtrained to ſuch degrees of theſe perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be ſo perfectly good as God is; nor partake of any other excellency in that tranſcendent degree, in which the divine nature is poſſeſs'd of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of ſo great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excel in any kind, is, *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum*

tandum proponere, to propoſe the higheſt and moſt perfect examples to our imitation. No man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one leſs perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is ſure to come ſhort of, is like to ſhoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Beſides, that the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, ſo it kindles ambition, and makes men ſtrain and contend to the utmoſt to do better: And though he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect pattern is no hindrance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be ſuppoſed to be our duty, which is abſolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reaſon be ſuppoſed to be ſo, as any thing that can be inſtanced in: becauſe in ſuch a caſe, if we do our beſt, and be continually preſſing forward towards the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raiſe our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, ſuch a will and endeavour will be acceptable with God for the deed. For if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the poſſibility of our performance, the aſſurance we have of God's goodneſs will ſufficiently ſecure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reaſonably preſume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to God, and as beneficial to our ſelves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfectly fulfilled it. If our heavenly Father, to try the readineſs and chearfulneſs of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do ſomething towards it, we may be ſure that he will be very well pleaſed when he ſees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this caſe reaſon as our Saviour does; *If we that are evil would deal thus with our children, how much more ſhall our heavenly father?* The goodneſs of God ſignifies very little, if it does not ſignify this, that in any inſtance of real and unqueſtionable goodneſs, God is much better than any father upon earth.

However at the worſt, that wherein we fall ſhort of the *perfection* of the law, may be ſupplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgement of our own weakneſs and imperfection; and on God's part, by mercy and forgiveneſs, for the ſake of the perfect obedience of our bleſſed Redeemer. This is the leaſt benefit we can expect in this caſe from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the goſpel.

5. And *laſtly*, which will fully clear this matter; this precept doth not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually aſcending and climbing up higher, ſtill advancing from one degree of goodneſs to another, and continually aſpiring after a nearer reſemblance to God: And this certainly is poſſible to us, to endeavour to be as like God as we can, in this weak and imperfect ſtate.

Whereas any equality with God, even in the communicable attributes of his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, is not only impoſſible to us in this ſtate of ſin and imperfection, but above the condition of a creature, even of *the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*, and of the higheſt angels in glory; for their perfection is not abſolute, but in compariſon with our preſent ſtate. And I think there is no great reaſon to doubt, but that the bleſſed ſpirits above, who continually behold the face of their father, are ſtill writing after this copy, which is here propounded to us; and endeavouring *to be perfect, as their father which is in heaven is perfect*; ſtill aſpiring after a nearer and more perfect reſemblance of God, whoſe goodneſs and mercy is ſo far beyond, and before that of any creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this ſeems to be no inconſiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happineſs of heaven, that the holineſs of good men (which is the ſimilitude of God) is never at a ſtand, nor at its full growth and period; but that the glorified ſaints (yea and bleſſed angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themſelves ſtill become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehenſion is no undervaluing the happineſs of heaven, that it is not ſo perfect at firſt, as it ſhall be afterwards; becauſe it is granted on all hands, that the happineſs of thoſe good ſouls, who are already in bliſs, ſhall be more perfect and compleat at the re-

ſurrection.

ſurrection. And why may it not then be continually increaſing, and be augmented ſtill more and more, without any ſtint or final period of its perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long courſe of goodneſs, and to be *weary of well-doing*. But in the other ſtate, when men ſhould be ſtrongly byaſſed to goodneſs, and having nothing to pull them back, it will then be ſo far from being a trouble, that methinks it ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to the bleſſed, to find that there is no end of their doing good, and becoming better. For if conformity to God be the ground and foundation of all happineſs, then our bleſſedneſs will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This, I confeſs, were a diſmal conſideration, to think that in heaven we ſhould be liable to relapſe, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy ſtate. But this is a comfortable conſideration, that our holineſs and happineſs ſhall never be at a ſtand, that it is ſecure ſo far as it goes, and that we cannot loſe what we have once attained, as we may do in this world. This, methinks, ſhould be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at firſt, he ſhall ſtill be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as God pleaſeth, (for we do but talk in the dark about our future ſtate) this is certain, that an equality with God in any of his *perfections*, is not to be attained by any creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: But that which our Saviour requires, is a vigorous imition of this pattern; that we have this example of the divine *perfection* always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring ourſelves to the neareſt reſemblance of God, that poſſibly we can. And if this be our ſincere care and ſtudy, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with God, and that he will be graciouſly pleaſed to eſteem us for his children; and if there need a pardon for it, that God will forgive us where we fall ſhort of the *perfection* of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had done all we could, we muſt ſtill fall much ſhort of the *perfection* of God's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas! which of us does near ſo much as we can, and is not conſcious to himſelf that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is ſo unlike his heavenly father in goodneſs and mercy, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs; and that he ſtill partakes in ſo great a meaſure of thoſe, not only unreaſonable and brutiſh, but even deviliſh paſſions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge; and that theſe ungodlike qualities do ſo frequently prevail upon us, and have ſo much dominion over us.

We are ſo far from being what we ought, in theſe and many other reſpects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conſcience, and make it our ſincere endeavour to ſubdue ourſelves to a conformity to God, and to a perfect holineſs in his fear.

Would we but often ſet God before our eyes, and repreſent to ourſelves thoſe excellent and amiable *perfections* of the divine nature, which are ſo comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we ſtand ſo infinitely obliged, his goodneſs and mercy and patience, upon which all our hopes of happineſs do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miſerable paſt recovery; that goodneſs and patience which he continually exerciſeth towards us, (for we provoke him every day), and exerciſeth towards us, on purpoſe to endear thoſe *perfections* to us, from which we reap ſo much comfort and advantage; that by the pattern of *perfection* itſelf, and the example of him who is ſo much above us, no ways obliged to us, nor tied by any intereſt to be concerned for us; and who being happy in himſelf, neither hopes nor fears any thing from us: I ſay, by an example that has all theſe advantages, we might be provoked to be ſo affected towards one another (who have mutual Obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil one from another) as we have always found God to be towards us, and as we deſire he ſhould ſtill continue; and miſerable creatures are we, whenever he ceaſeth to be ſo: And we have reaſon to fear he will ceaſe to be ſo, if this example of his goodneſs and patience towards us do not transform us into the image of the divine *perfections*, and prevail upon us to imitate thoſe excellencies which we have ſo much reaſon to approve and admire, and be in love withal.

Theſe conſiderations, taken both from ingenuity and intereſt, ſhould awaken our ſloth, and ſtir up our moſt reſolute and vigorous endeavours after that *perfection* which our Saviour here requires, and make us aſhamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is ſet ſo high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one ſtep towards it, and are ſo remiſs and unconcern'd about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greateſt eaſe, and at an hour's warning, before we leave the world, could fulfil this precept of our Lord, of *being perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

And yet, let me tell you, ſo far as any of us are from reſembling our heavenly Father in ſome good degree and meaſure, ſo far are we diſtant from heaven, and the temper of the bleſſed; ſo far are we utterly unqualified for the bliſsful ſight and enjoyment of God: for unleſs we be firſt *like him*, we cannot *ſee him as he is: Only the pure in heart ſhall ſee God*; and therefore *every man that has this' hope in him*, ſhould *purify himſelf even as he is pure.*

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, diſpatched the *four* things I propounded for the explication of this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the divine *perfections*, and to give ſome rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God; to explain the extent of this duty, and vindicate the poſſibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw ſome uſeful inferences from this diſcourſe which I have made; and they ſhall be theſe *two:*

I. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential *perfections* of God.

II. That the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion, conſiſts in the *imitation* of God.

1. That the ſtrongeſt and ſureſt reaſonings in religion, are grounded upon the eſſential *perfections* of God; ſo that even divine revelation itſelf doth ſuppoſe theſe for its foundation, and can ſignify nothing to us, unleſs theſe be firſt known and believed. Unleſs we be firſt perſuaded of the providence of God, and his particular care of mankind, why ſhould we believe that he would make any revelation of himſelf to men? Unleſs it be naturally known to us, that God is true; what foundation is there for the belief of his word? And what ſignifies the laws and promiſes of God, unleſs natural light do firſt aſſure us of his ſovereign authority and faithfulneſs? So that the principles of natural religion, are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore, in reaſon, nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts his eſſential *perfection*; and, conſequently, if any pretends divine revelation for this doctrine, that God hath from all eternity abſolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greateſt part of mankind, without any reſpect to the ſins and demerits of men, I am as certain that this doctrine cannot be of God, as I am ſure that God is good and juſt: becauſe this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodneſs and juſtice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodneſs; and therefore if *an Apoſtle or Angel from heaven* teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodneſs and juſtice of God, *let him be accurſed.* For every man hath greater aſſurance that God is good and juſt, than he can have of any ſubtle ſpeculations about predeſtination and the decrees of God.

And for the ſame reaſon, I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any man or church in the world, that God would not have men underſtand their publick prayers, and the leſſons of ſcripture which are read to them. A leſſon not to be underſtood, is nonſence: a leſſon is ſomething to be learned; which how it can be without being underſtood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe, upon the authority of any perſon or church whatſoever, that God ſhould reveal his will to men in the holy Scriptures, with a deſign to have it hid, and lock'd up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much leſs can I believe (which yet is the expreſs doctrine of the council of *Trent)* that the ſaving efficacy of the ſacrament, depends upon the intention of the prieſt. Which is to ſay, that though people believe, and live never ſo well, they may be damned by ſholes and whole pariſhes together, at the pleaſure of the prieſt; and for no other reaſon, but becauſe he is ſo wicked as not to intend to ſave them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of God's goodneſs? May we not in this caſe appeal, as *Abraham* did, to the goodneſs and juſtice of God, and expoſtulate with greater reaſon than he did, much after the ſame manner, *Wilt thou* *deſtroy the righteous for the wicked? That be far from thee to do after this manner.* To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people ſhould lie at the mercy of a wicked prieſt, to be damned or ſaved at his pleaſure, *that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* And can there be a greater Affront to the goodneſs and juſtice of God, than to imagine he ſhould deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no poſſibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one inſtance more; I can never believe, upon the authority of any man, or church whatſoever, that our Saviour, in the celebration of his laſt ſupper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his diſciples; and give his blood ſhed, before it was ſhed; that the whole doctrine of chriſtianity ſhould mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the aſſurance of which depends upon the certainty of ſenſe; and yet that an eſſential part of that doctrine ſhould overthrow the certainty of ſenſe. I can never while I live believe theſe two things, that the laſt thing our Saviour did before his death, ſhould be to teach his diſciples not to believe their own ſenſes, as he muſt do if he taught them tranſubſtantiation; and that the very firſt thing he did after he was riſen from the dead, ſhould be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of ſenſe for the proof of his reſurrection; for when they doubted of his reſurrection, *Luke* xxiv. 38. *He ſaid unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts ariſe in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I my ſelf: handle me, and ſee, for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me have.* If this be a good argument, that it was a real body which they ſaw, becauſe they ſaw and felt fleſh and bones, is it not as good an argument on the other ſide, that what they ſaw in the ſacrament was not his real and natural body, becauſe they could neither ſee nor handle fleſh and bones? So that I cannot believe tranſubſtantiation, unleſs I can believe that truth itſelf can contradict and deſtroy itſelf.

You ſee of what uſe it is to have right and ſteady apprehenſions of the divine *perfections*; that, theſe being laid for a foundation, we may, upon all occaſions, have recourſe to them, and govern our opinions and reaſonings in religion, about all doubtful Matters, by ſuch principles as are clear and unqueſtionable. The

II. Inference is, That the trueſt and moſt ſubſtantial practice of religion, conſiſts in the imitation of the divine *perfections*, eſpecially the moral *perfections* of the divine nature, which the ſcripture is wont to comprehend under the name of *holineſs*; and ſuch are the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience of God, his juſtice, and truth, and faithfulneſs. To imitate God in theſe, is true religion; or, as St. *James* expreſſes it, *pure religion, and undefiled,* ἀμίαντος, without any flaw or blemiſh, alluding to precious ſtones, the greateſt commendation of which is to be clear, and without flaw. *Religio eſt, imitari quem colis; That is religion, to imitate him whom we worſhip.* This the heathens, by the light of nature, did diſcover to be the great end of religion, and the beſt worſhip of the deity, to be like God. *Pythagoras* was want to ſay, "That we honour God moſt, when we are moſt like him in "the temper and diſpoſition of our minds." And *Plato* to the ſame purpoſe, "That the height and *perfection* of goodneſs, is to reſemble God, as near as is poſ"ſible; and that we reſemble God, in being juſt, and holy, and wiſe." So likewiſe *Hierocles*, "That a good man imitates God, in the meaſures of love and friend"ſhip, who hates no man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." *Plutarch* hath an excellent diſcourſe about the patience of God towards ſinners, and gives this as one reaſon why God doth not preſently puniſh offenders, "That he might give "an example to us of gentleneſs and patience, and check the fury and violence of "men in revenging injuries upon one another; which nothing will do more effectu"ally, than to conſider that gentleneſs and forbearance, are an imitation of the "divine *perfection*:" And then he cites an excellent ſaying of *Plato*, "That God "manifeſted himſelf, and diſplayed his *perfections* in the world, for our imitation; "true virtue being nothing elſe, but an imitation of the divine nature." For there is no greater benefit man can receive from God's hand, than to become virtuous by the imitation and purſuit of thoſe excellencies and *perfections* which are in God. *Seneca* likewiſe hath many paſſages to this purpoſe, *Inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia eſt, imò etiam neceſſitudo & ſimilitudo; Between God and men there is a friendſhip, yea, and an intimacy and likeneſs:* And that a virtuous man is *diſcipulus æmulatorque & progenies Dei, a diſciple and imitator, and the very* *genuine off-ſpring of God.* So that the light of nature and the reaſon of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the divine excellencies and *perfections.*

And this is very agreeable to the language and ſenſe of the holy ſcriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to conſiſt in our conformity to God, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing elſe but a tranſcript of his nature. The great buſineſs of religion is to do the will of God; and *this is the will of God, our ſanctification*; and our ſanctification is our conformity to the holineſs of God; and this is the ſcope of the general exhortations of ſcripture, to perſuade us to holineſs, that is, to an imitation of the moral *perfections* of the divine nature, 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved; let us cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God,* 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. *As he which hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of converſation, becauſe it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy,* 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. ſpeaking of the chriſtian religion, which he calls *the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby alſo* (ſays he) *are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by theſe we might be partakers of a divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through luſt.* So that the holineſs the goſpel deſigns to bring us to, is a *participation of the divine nature,* which we can no otherwiſe partake of, but by an imitation of the *divine perfections.* This is that which the ſcripture expreſſes to us by the terms of *regeneration,* the *new man* and the *new creature.* And therefore thoſe who are converted from a wicked and ſinful ſtate, and reclaimed to goodneſs, are ſaid *to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs, and the holineſs of truth.* Eph. iv. 23. *To be renewed after the image of him that created us.* Coloſſ. iii. 10. This is to be *the* ſons *and* children *of God, to* imitate *and reſemble God in our diſpoſitions and manners.* Eph. v. 1. *Be ye therefore,* μιμηταὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, *imitators of God, as dear children.* Phil. ii. 15. *That ye may be blameleſs and ſincere, the ſons of God without rebuke, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation.* 1 John iii. 10. *In this the children of God are maniſeſt, and the children of the devil; whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.* There have been great enquiries concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and reſemblance of God in thoſe *perfections,* wherein he is ſet forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly conſiſts the practice both of natural religion, and of true chriſtianity.

But does not religion conſiſt very much in the duties of God's worſhip, in the exerciſe of piety and devotion, in conſtant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodneſs by praiſe and thanſgiving, in reading and hearing, and meditating upon God's word, in faſting and abſtinence, and keeping our bodies in ſubjection to our ſpirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy ſacrament? To this I anſwer, that religion doth conſiſt very much in the due performance of theſe duties, and they are unqueſtionable and neceſſary parts of religion, and the means appointed by God for the begetting and increaſing in us ſuch diſpoſitions of mind, as render us moſt like to God, and for the production of all the fruits of goodneſs, and holineſs, and righteouſneſs in our lives.

But then it is to be conſidered, that theſe exerciſes of piety and devotion are but the *means* of religion, and not the ultimate end and deſign of it. All theſe do but ſerve to bring us to a nearer reſemblance of God; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own ſakes only, and we reſt in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they loſe their nature; becauſe they are not uſed as *means,* but reſted in, as if they were the *end* of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal miſtake about religion, and think that if they do but ſerve God in their families, and go to church, and behave themſelves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain ſeaſons receive the ſacrament, they are truly religious, and very good chriſtians; when all this while they take no care to improve themſelves in real goodneſs, by an inward conformity of their minds to God, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives, by mortifying their luſts, and ſubduing their appetites and paſſions to the laws of reaſon and religion, by *putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of kindneſs*; by being true and faithful, righteous and juſt, patient and merciful, *as their father which is in heaven is* ſo; and by *forbearing one another,* in caſe of provocation, and *forgiving one another, even as God, for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us*; by *purifying themſelves as God is pure*, and endeavouring to *be holy in all manner of converſation, as he who hath called them is holy*; when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly-minded, and, to ſerve their covetouſneſs, will ſtrain a point of truth or juſtice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by mere importunity, or ſome ſuch urgent neceſſity, in point of decency and reputation, that for ſhame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when their paſſions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterneſs, their tongues of ſlander and evil-ſpeaking, their humours as proud, and ſurly, and cenſorious, as theirs can be who are openly prophane, and ſeem to neglect and deſpiſe all religion: And yet becauſe they ſerve God (as they call it) and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good church-men, and attend upon the ordinances of God, they think they have diſcharged the whole buſineſs of religion admirably well, and are very good *children of God*, and in a ſtate of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all theſe duties, and the uſe of all theſe means ſeparated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of ourſelves to God, in thoſe qualities and diſpoſitions which I have mentioned, is ſo far from finding acceptance with God, that it is an abomination to him. So God every-where declares in ſcripture, telling us, that *the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*; and that he diſdains to be praiſed by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unleſs with *the praiſes we offer to him, we order our converſation aright, we ſhall not ſee the ſalvation of God.* With what contempt does he ſpeak of this formal external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! *To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices to me? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, and ten thouſands of rivers of oil? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Is not this the faſt which I have choſen, to break the bands of wickedneſs, and to let the oppreſſed go free; to deal thy bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the poor, that are caſt out, to thine houſe; when thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own fleſh?*

Nor is it *hearing of the word* that will avail us, unleſs *we be doers of it. Bleſſed are they* (ſays our Saviour) *that hear the word of God, and keep it. He that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, ſhall be likened to a wiſe man, who hath built his houſe upon a rock.* Nor will bare receiving the ſacrament recommend us to God; but performing the obligation, which thereby we take upon ourſelves, to abſtain from all ſin and wickedneſs; otherwiſe *we tread under foot the ſon of God, and prophane the blood of the covenant, whereby we ſhould be ſanctified, as if it were an unholy thing.* Can any man think *that* to be religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads thoſe plain words of St. *James, If any man among you ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction, and to keep himſelf unſpotted from the world.* When religion produceth theſe real effects, then the *means* of religion do truly ſerve the *end* of it; and we are *not* only *hearers of the word, but doers of it,* and *ſhall be bleſſed in our deed.*

So that as there is an obligation upon us to uſe the *means* of religion, which God hath inſtituted, with great care and conſcience; ſo we ſhould chiefly mind that which is the *end* of all religion, which is to make us *partakers of a divine nature*, and make us like to God, eſpecially in thoſe amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the divine nature, his benignity and goodneſs, his mercy and patience. Theſe, becauſe they are the primary *perfections* of God, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indiſpenſible obligation; becauſe they have their foundation in the nature of God, which is fix'd, and unalterable: And all poſitive inſtitutions, when they come in competition with theſe, are to ſtoop and veil to them. *Natural* and *moral* duties, eſpecially thoſe of goodneſs, and mercy, and charity, are ſo ſtrongly bound upon us, that nothing in any *revealed* religion can cancel the obligation of them, or juſtify the violation of theſe great and indiſpenſable laws. Our Saviour, in his religion, has declared nothing to the prejudice of them; but, on the contrary, has ſtraitened our obligation to them as much as is poſſible: *The ſon of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them*; ſo that they *know not what manner of ſpirit they are of*, who think to pleaſe God by hating men, who are made after the image of God, and *by killing one another, to do him good ſervice*; who, to advance his cauſe and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil ſociety, undermine government, and diſturb the peace of mankind.

Whereas our Saviour did not by any thing in his religion deſign to alter the civil government of the world, or to leſſen and diminiſh the rights of Princes, or to ſet men looſe from allegiance to them, or to make treaſon and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous maſſacres lawful, for the propagating of his Faith. He had (as any one would imagine) as much power as the pope; but yet he depoſed no princes, nor excommunicated and diſcharged their ſubjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their oppoſition to his religion: he hath aſſumed no ſuch power to himſelf. *By what authority then doth* his vicar *do theſe things*; *and who gave him this authority?* Our Lord tells us plainly *his kingdom was not of this world*; and that without any diſtinction of *in ordine ad ſpiritualia*, and therefore he wreſted no prince's kingdom out of his hands, nor ſeized it as forfeited to himſelf.

But this power the pope claims to himſelf, and hath exerciſed it many a time, diſturbing the peace of nations, and exerciſing the moſt barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretence of zeal for God and religion; as if becauſe religion is ſo very good a thing in itſelf, it would warrant men to do the very worſt things for its ſake; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the beſt things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preſerve in the minds of men any reverence and eſteem for religion, we muſt take heed how we deſtroy the principles of *natural religion*, and undermine the peace and happineſs of human ſociety, for the glory of God, and under pretence of following divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err: for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconſiſtent with the eſſential *perfections* of God, and with the peace and order of the world; *for God is not the God of confuſion, but of order*; which St. *Paul* appealeth to as a principle of eternal truth, and naturally known: But they that pretend that religion prompts men to ſedition and cruelty, do repreſent God as *the God of confuſion*, and *not of order*.

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religion, let us place it in that which is unqueſtionable, the imitation of the divine *perfections*, and let us (as the apoſtle exhorts) *put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindneſs, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, and above all let us put on charity, which is the very bond of perfection.* The great *perfection* of the divine nature, or rather the very eſſence of God, is love. So St. *John* ſpeaks, *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.* And 'tis very remarkable, that in theſe very qualities of charity, and kindneſs, and compaſſion, which we peculiarly call *humanity*, we approach neareſt to the *divinity* itſelf, and that the contrary diſpoſitions do transform us into wild beaſts and devils.

And yet as ſeverely as I ſpeak againſt theſe principles and practices, I have an hearty pity and compaſſion for thoſe who are under the power of ſo great a deluſion; and upon a pretence of being made the only true chriſtians in the world, are ſeduced from *humanity* itſelf; and ſo far from being made good *chriſtians* by theſe principles, that they are hardly left to be *men*, *being blinded, and led by the blind, they fall into the ditch* of the groſſeſt and fouleſt immoralities; ſuch as are plainly enough condemned by the light of nature, if there were no bible in the world.

Not but that we proteſtants have our faults and our follies too, and thoſe (God knows!) too many and too viſible; we poſſeſs more truth, but there is little peace among us; and yet God is as well and as often in ſcripture called *the God of peace*, as *the God of truth*. In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out; we are full of heats and animoſities, of ſchiſms and diviſions, *and the way of peace we have not known*. God grant that at laſt *in this our day* (when it concerns us ſo much) we may *know the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes!*

You ſee in what things the practice of religion mainly conſiſts, in our likeneſs to God, and reſemblance of him in holineſs and goodneſs; and without this we are utterly incapable of happineſs: we cannot *ſee* God unleſs *we be like him.* The preſence of God can adminiſter no pleaſure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image; till we come to this temper, to hate ſin, and delight in purity and holineſs, we can have no delightful communion with the holy God; till our paſſions be ſubdued, and our ſouls diſpoſſeſt of thoſe deviliſh and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience; and till we be endued with the ſpirit of univerſal goodneſs and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly father: we are not qualified *to dwell with God,* who is *love, and dwells in love.* So far as we are defective in theſe divine qualities and perfections, ſo far we fall ſhort of the temper of happineſs.

There is a direct and eternal oppoſition between the holy and good God, and the evil diſpoſitions of wicked men; and till this oppoſition be removed, it is impoſſible we ſhould find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the nature of God is fixed and unchangeable; God cannot recede from his own *perfection,* and therefore we muſt quit our ſins: Thou canſt not change God, therefore change thy ſelf; and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, *with whom is no variableneſs nor ſhadow of turning.* God condeſcended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happineſs; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

SERMON LXXVIII.

The Happineſs of God.

1 TIM. i. 11. *The bleſſed God*——

The whole Verſe runs thus:

According to the glorious goſpel of the bleſſed God, which was committed to my truſt.

SINCE all men naturally deſire *happineſs,* and thirſt after it; methinks we ſhould all deſire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What *Job* ſays of *wiſdom* may be ſaid alſo of *happineſs, God underſtandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.* He only, who is perfectly poſſeſt of it himſelf, knows wherein it conſiſts, and what are the true ingredients of it.

So that to direct us in our ſearch after *happineſs,* the beſt way will be to contemplate and conſider the divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of *happineſs,* and the original ſpring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon theſe words, wherein the Apoſtle attributes this perfection of *bleſſedneſs* or *happineſs* to God, *The bleſſed God.*

And though this be as eſſential a part as any other of that notion which mankind have of God from the light of nature, yet I no where find in all the New Teſtament, this attribute of *happineſs* given to God, but only twice in this epiſtle. 'Tis true indeed, the title of *bleſſedneſs* is frequently given both to God and Chriſt, but in another ſenſe, and in a quite different notion: As *Mark* xiv. 61. where the high prieſt aſks our Saviour, *Art thou the Chriſt, the ſon of the bleſſed?* τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ, *of him that is to be celebrated and praiſed*; 2 Cor. xi. 31. *The God and father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is bleſſed for evermore.* So likewiſe, *Rom.* i. 25. *The creator bleſſed for evermore:* Which likewiſe is ſaid of Chriſt, *Rom.* ix. 5. *Of whom Chriſt came, who is over all, God bleſſed for evermore*; that is, *for ever to be praiſed and celebrated.* But in all theſe texts the *Greek* word is εὐλογητὸς, which though we tranſlate *bleſſed,* yet it is a quite different notion from the title of *bleſſedneſs,* which is given to God in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητὸς but μακάριος, *the bleſſed* or *happy God*; and this title is not any where in all the New Teſtament, (that I know of) given to God, but here in the text, and chap. vi. *v.* 15. where our Lord Jeſus Chriſt (who alſo is God) is called *the bleſſed and the only potentate.* And whether this title of *the bleſſed* or *the happy God*, be here in the text given to God the Father, or to his eternal Son, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; is not ſo much material to my preſent purpoſe to enquire. For, ſuppoſe it be Chriſt, who is here called *the bleſſed God*; this however is certain, that *bleſſedneſs* or *happineſs* is a title belonging to *God*, which is all that is neceſſary for a foundation of my preſent diſcourſe.

In ſpeaking of this argument, I ſhall do theſe *three* things:

I. Shew what we are to underſtand by the *happineſs* of God, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to God, and that the divine nature is perfectly *bleſſed* and *happy*.

III. How far creatures are capable of *happineſs*, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it: And ſhall then make ſome inferences from my diſcourſe upon this argument.

I. I will conſider what we are to underſtand by the *bleſſedneſs* or *happineſs* of God, and what are the eſſential ingredients of it. Now the notion of *happineſs*, taken at its higheſt pitch (as we muſt neceſſarily do when we apply it to God) is no other than a fixed and immoveable ſtate of contentment and ſatisfaction, of pleaſure and delight, reſulting from the ſecure poſſeſſion and enjoyment of all that is good and deſirable, that is, of all excellency and perfection; ſo that theſe following ingredients muſt go to make up a perfect ſtate of *happineſs*.

1. Perfect knowledge, to underſtand what it is that conſtitutes *happineſs*, and to know when one is really poſſeſt of it. For as he is not *happy*, who is ſo only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleaſed with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly *happy*: ſo, on the other hand, he that has all other neceſſary ingredients of *happineſs*, and only wants this, that he doth not think himſelf ſo, cannot be *happy*. For this we often ſee in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumſtances of a worldly *happineſs* about them; yet, by the unſkilful management of the matter, and from a lightneſs and injudiciouſneſs of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard ſhift, even when they are in as good circumſtances, as it is almoſt poſſible for men to be in this world, to be very diſcontented and miſerable in their own opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes *happineſs*, and that he is poſſeſt of it.

2. To perfect *happineſs* is likewiſe required a full power to do whatever conduceth to *happineſs*, and likewiſe to check and controul whatever would be an hindrance and diſturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-ſufficient, and hath not within its power and reach whatever is neceſſary to an happy condition, and neceſſary to ſecure and continue that *happineſs* againſt all attempts and accidents whatſoever.

3. There is wiſdom alſo required to direct this power, and manage it in ſuch a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different from mere power abſtractedly conſidered; for one may have all the materials of *happineſs*, and yet want the wiſdom and ſkill to put them ſo together, as to frame an happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly underſtand the proper method and means of compaſſing and ſecuring his own *happineſs*.

4. Another moſt conſiderable and eſſential ingredient of *happineſs* is goodneſs; without which, as there can be no true majeſty and greatneſs, ſo neither can there be any *felicity* or *happineſs*. Now goodneſs is a generous diſpoſition of mind to communicate and diffuſe itſelf, by making others partakers of its *happineſs*, in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, and as wiſdom ſhall direct: For he is not ſo happy as he may be, who hath not the pleaſure of making others ſo, and of ſeeing them put into an happy condition by his means, which is the higheſt pleaſure (I had almoſt ſaid *pride*, but I may truly ſay *glory*) of a good and great mind: For by ſuch communications of himſelf, an immenſe and all-ſufficient being doth not leſſen

himſelf, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himſelf; and does, as I may ſay, give great eaſe and delight to a full and fruitful being, without the leaſt diminution of his power and happineſs. For the cauſe and original of all other beings can make nothing ſo independent upon itſelf, as not ſtill to maintain his intereſt in it, to have it always under his power and government; and no being can rebel againſt his Maker, without extream hazard to himſelf.

5. Perfect *happineſs* doth imply the exerciſe of all other virtues, which are ſuitable to ſo perfect a being, upon all proper and fitting occaſions; that is, that ſo perfect a being do nothing that is contrary to, or unbecomiug his holineſs and righteouſneſs, his truth and faithfulneſs, which are eſſential to a perfect being; and for ſuch a being to act contrary to them in any caſe, would be to create diſquiet and diſturbance to itſelf: For this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature without reluctancy and diſpleaſure, which in moral agents is that which we call *guilt*; for *guilt* is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from the conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being, that is, ſomething that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befal ſo perfect, and immutable a being as God is.

6. Perfect *happineſs* implies in it the ſettled and ſecure poſſeſſion of all thoſe excellencies and perfections; for if any of theſe were liable to fail, or be diminiſhed, ſo much would be taken off from perfect and compleat *happineſs*. If the Deity were ſubject to any change or impairment of his condition, ſo that either his knowledge, or power, or wiſdom, or goodneſs, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of *happineſs*. And from all theſe does reſult, in the

7th and *laſt* place, Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction, pleaſure and delight, which is the very *eſſence* of *happineſs*.

1. Infinite contentment and ſatisfaction in this condition. And well may *happineſs* be contented with itſelf, that is, with ſuch a condition, that he that is poſſeſt of it, can neither deſire it ſhould be better, nor have any cauſe to fear it ſhould be worſe.

2. Pleaſure and delight, which is ſomething more than contentment: For one may be contented with an affliction, and painful condition, in which he is far from taking any pleaſure and delight. *No affliction is joyous for the preſent, but grievous*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks *Heb.* xii. But there cannot be perfect *happineſs* without pleaſure in our condition. Full pleaſure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be expreſſed in words, but certainly known by inward ſenſe and experience.

And thus I have endeavoured to deſcribe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expreſſions of God, the *happineſs* of the divine nature, and wherein it conſiſts. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, that this attribute of perfection doth belong to God; and that the divine nature is *perfectly bleſſed, and happy*; and this is ſo univerſal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very ſuperfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpoſe; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity, *beatiſſimam & perfectiſſimam naturam, the moſt happy and moſt perfect Being*, and therefore *happy*, becauſe felicity doth naturally reſult from *perfection*. It ſhall ſuffice to take notice of theſe *two* things out of heathen writers, to my preſent purpoſe:

1. That they accounted *happineſs* ſo eſſential to the notion of a God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not; to conſider, what things are conſiſtent with *happineſs*, or inconſiſtent with it; and whatever did ſignify *happineſs*, and was a perfection conſiſtent with it, they aſcribed to God, as a ſuitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwiſe, they removed it from God, as unfit to be ſaid of him.

2. Whatever differences there were among the philoſophers concerning the *perfections* of the *divine nature*, they all agreed in the *perfect felicity* of it; even *Epicurus* himſelf, who ſo boldly attempted to ſtrip the *divine nature* of moſt of its perfections, by denying that God either made or governed the world; whereby he took away at once his being the firſt cauſe and original of all things, and his goodneſs likewiſe,

and wiſdom, and power, and juſtice, or at leaſt made all theſe uſeleſs, by taking away all occaſion and opportunity for the exerciſe of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profeſs to believe the *happineſs* of the divine nature; and then out of an ignorant and officious kindneſs to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the ſecurity of his felicity, did, in effect, take away his other perfections; he would by no means put God to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, leſt this ſhould diſcompoſe the Deity, or be an interruption or diſturbance of his eaſe and felicity. For thus *Lucretius*, the great diſciple of *Epicurus*, deſcribes his opinion of the divine nature:

> Omnis enim divûm, per ſe, natura neceſſe eſt,
> Immortali ævo ſummâ cum pace fruatur,
> Semota à noſtris rebus, ſejunctaque longè.
> Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
> Ipſa ſuis pollens opibus, nihil indiga noſtri,
> Nec benè pro meritis capitur, nec tangitur irâ.

That is, *It is neceſſary that the divine nature ſhould be happy, and therefore altogether unconcerned in our affairs; free from all grief and danger, ſufficient for itſelf, and ſtanding in need of no body, neither pleaſed with our good actions, nor provoked by our faults.* This was a very falſe notion both of *God* and *happineſs*, to imagine that the care of the world ſhould be a pain and diſturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs. But this is not now my buſineſs to conſider; that which is to my preſent purpoſe, is, that the *happineſs* of the divine nature was univerſally owned; and that *bleſſedneſs* is ſo inſeparable from the notion of a Deity, that whoever profeſſes to believe a God, muſt acknowledge him to be *perfectly happy.*

As for the teſtimony of ſcripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of ὁ μακάριος, *the happy* or *bleſſed*, is given to God: but by conſequence the ſcripture every where declares the *happineſs* of the divine nature, *viz.* where-ever it ſpeaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and of the eternity and unchangeableneſs of theſe, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of theſe *perfections.* I ſhall now proceed to the

III. And *laſt* thing which I propoſed to conſider, *viz.* How far *creatures* are capable of *happineſs*, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of *abſolute* and *perfect happineſs*, becauſe *that* reſults from *infinite perfection*, which is no where to be found but in God: It remains then, that *creatures* are only capable of being *happy* in a *finite* and *limited* degree, by the reſemblance of *God*, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, and by our likeneſs to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are *creatures* of a *finite power*, and limited underſtandings, and a mutable nature, we do neceſſarily want many of thoſe *perfections*, which are the cauſe and ingredients of a *perfect happineſs.* We are far from being ſufficient for our own happineſs; we are neither ſo of ourſelves, nor can we make ourſelves ſo by our own power; for neither are we wiſe enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own ſatisfaction. All the *happineſs* that we are capable of, is by communication from him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made *partakers of the divine nature,* (as St. *Peter* ſpeaks) by our reſemblance of God in thoſe *perfections* which are the moſt eſſential ingredients of happineſs, his goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and truth, and holineſs; theſe do immediately qualify us for the favour and friendſhip of Almighty God, and for the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him; and the favour of God, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, and his friendſhip and good-will to us, ſupplies all defects of power and wiſdom in us: For God being our friend, we have an intereſt in all his *perfections*, and a ſecurity, that, as occaſion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage; ſo that though we are *weak in our ſelves*, we are *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, and are *able to do all things through him ſtrengthening us*; and though *we want wiſdom*, we may have free recourſe to the fountain of it, and *aſk of God, who gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not.* And it is next to having theſe *perfections* in ourſelves, to know where to have them for aſking, whenever we ſtand in need of them, ſo far as is neceſſary to our *happineſs*.

So that though our happineſs depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify ourſelves for it, (and God is always ready to aſſiſt us by his grace to this purpoſe) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as ſafe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were ſufficient for ourſelves. However, this is the higheſt *happineſs* that the condition of a *creature* is capable of, to have all our defects ſupplied in ſo liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourſe to the fountain of happineſs, and at laſt to be admitted to the bleſſed ſight and enjoyment of him, *in whoſe preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore.* I have done with the *three* things I propoſed to ſpeak to.

But to what purpoſe, may ſome ſay, is this long deſcription and diſcourſe of *happineſs?* How are we the wiſer and the better for it? I anſwer; Very much, in ſeveral reſpects.

1. This plainly ſhews us, that *atheiſm* is a very melancholy and miſchievous thing; it would take away the *fountain* of *happineſs*, and the only perfect *pattern* of it; it endeavours at once to extinguiſh the being of God, and all the life and comfort of mankind, ſo that we could neither form any idea of *happineſs*, or be in any poſſibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not ſufficient for it of ourſelves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us ſo. God is *the true light of the world*, and a thouſand times more neceſſary to the comfort and happineſs of mankind, than the ſun itſelf, which is but a dark ſhadow of that infinitely more bright and glorious being; *the happy and only potentate* (as the apoſtle deſcribes him in the latter end of this epiſtle) *who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, nor can ſee,* meaning in this mortal ſtate.

So that the greateſt enemies, and moſt injurious of all others to mankind, are thoſe who would baniſh the belief of a God out of the world; becauſe this is *to lay the ax to the root of the tree*, and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happineſs from mankind. So that he is a *fool* indeed, that *ſays in his heart, there is no God*; that is, that wiſheth there were none; becauſe it is not poſſible for a man to wiſh worſe to himſelf, and more effectually to deſtroy his own happineſs.

2. If the divine nature be ſo *infinitely* and *compleatly happy*, this is a very great confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happineſs of another life, which the ſcripture deſcribes to us, by the ſight and enjoyment of God. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happineſs that is abſolutely and infinitely perfect; becauſe our nature is but finite, and limited; but *the bleſſed God*, who is *infinitely happy* himſelf, can alſo make us *happy* according to our *finite* meaſure and capacity. For, as he that is the firſt and original being, can communicate being to other things; ſo he that is the fountain of happineſs, can derive and convey happineſs to his creatures.

And we ſhall the more eaſily believe this, when we conſider that *goodneſs*, as it is the prime perfection, ſo is it likewiſe the chief felicity of the divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himſelf, and ſhed abroad his goodneſs; and the higheſt expreſſion of the *divine goodneſs*, is to communicate happineſs to his creatures, and to be willing that they ſhould ſhare and partake with him in it. Baſe and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themſelves, and are loth that others ſhould take part with them: but the moſt noble and moſt generous minds are moſt free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themſelves, unleſs they find or make others ſo.

This is the higheſt pitch of goodneſs, and conſequently the higheſt contentment, and the ſupreme delight of the divine nature. Now it is natural to every being, to be moſt frequent and abundant in thoſe acts in which it finds the greateſt pleaſure; *to be good*, and *to do good*, is the ſupreme felicity of God himſelf; therefore we may eaſily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his wiſdom and righteouſneſs; and that he is alſo willing to make us abundantly ſo, and to advance us to the higheſt degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render ourſelves incapable of ſuch a bleſſing, by an obſtinate refuſal of it, and utter indiſpoſition for it.

This, I ſay, is very credible, becauſe the *happineſs* of God himſelf conſiſts in that propenſion and diſpoſition of nature, which tends to make others *happy.* And if there can be any acceſſion to that which is *infinite*, God himſelf finds a new pleaſure and felicity in the communication of his goodneſs to his creatures; and therefore is repreſented in ſcripture, as glad of *the converſion of a ſinner*, becauſe the ſinner hereby becomes capable of the *happineſs* which God deſigned for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, beſtow it upon them.

There are *two* things which raiſe our hopes and expectation of good from any perſon, if he be *able* and *willing* to beſtow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer *happineſs* upon us, it is he who is *infinitely* poſſeſt of it, and hath all the treaſures of it in himſelf; and *that* God only is, who as he is *able*, ſo he is *willing* to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happineſs to make others happy, for even that goodneſs which inclines him to communicate happineſs to others, is a great part of his own felicity; ſo that, as our Saviour argues, *becauſe I live, you ſhall live alſo*; we may reaſon in like manner, that *becauſe God is happy, we ſhall be happy alſo*; if we do but ſincerely deſire and endeavour to qualify ourſelves for it. The goodneſs of God does ſtrongly incline him to deſire our happineſs, and makes him willing and ready to beſtow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So that the *goodneſs* of God is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmeſt ground of our aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality. It is the happineſs of the divine nature to communicate himſelf; and the communications of God's goodneſs to us are the cauſe of our happineſs; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the *goodneſs* of God ought always to be repreſented to the greateſt advantage, and we ſhould endeavour to poſſeſs our minds with a firm belief and perſuaſion of it, and to remove from the divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodneſs than is to be found in any of the ſons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vindicate God from all ſuſpicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men ſhould be averſe from theſe ſo agreeable and delightful apprehenſions of God; or how it ſhould be any man's intereſt to leſſen the *goodneſs* of God: for moſt certainly the better God is in himſelf, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been ſaid concerning the *happineſs* of the *divine nature*, we may learn wherein our *happineſs* muſt conſiſt, namely, in the *image* and in the *favour* of God; in the *favour* of God, as the cauſe of our happineſs; and in the *image* of God, as a neceſſary inward diſpoſition and qualification for it. Unleſs God love us, we cannot be *happy*; for miſerable are they whom he hates: for God to ſay of any man, that *his ſoul hath no pleaſure in him*, imports as great miſery, and as dreadful a curſe as can be imagined, and *his ſoul* can *have no pleaſure* in a bad man; for *he loveth righteouſneſs and hateth iniquity: he is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him: the wicked ſhall not ſtand in his ſight*; *he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* Nay, if we could ſuppoſe that he could love and take pleaſure in any perſon that is unlike to him, (which is impoſſible) yet that perſon could not be *happy*, becauſe he would want that inward frame and diſpoſition of mind, which is neceſſary to *happineſs:* For the very ſame cauſes and ingredients which make up the *happineſs of God*, muſt, in an inferior degree be found in us, otherwiſe we cannot be *happy*; no, though a man were in heaven, if he be ſtill a bad man, *Cœlum, non animum mutavit*; he hath only *changed the climate*, and is gone into another *country*, but he bears *himſelf* ſtill about him, and his *mind* is not changed, which would ſignify a thouſand times more to his *happineſs*, than any *place* or *outward circumſtance* whatſoever. A bad man, whereſoever he goes, hath a *root of gall and bitterneſs* within him, and is miſerable from *himſelf*; he hath a fiend in his own breaſt, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conſcience.

For there is a certain temper and diſpoſition of mind, that is neceſſary and eſſential to *happineſs*, and *that* is *holineſs* and *goodneſs*, which is the nature of God;

and ſo much as any perſon departs from this temper, ſo far he removes himſelf, and runs away from *happineſs:* And as ſin is *a departure from God,* ſo the puniſhment of it is likewiſe expreſſed by *departing from him*; *Depart from me ye curſed*; *depart from me all ye that work iniquity, I know you not.*

And this is one great part of the miſery of thoſe degenerate and accurſed ſpirits, the devils, who are for ever baniſhed from the preſence of God, that they are of a temper quite contrary to God, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, miſchievous and cruel; and ſuch a temper is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſition of our minds; and till this be cured, and ſet right, it is as impoſſible for any of us to be *happy,* as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at eaſe. And the external preſence of God and a *local* heaven (if we could imagine ſuch a perſon to be admitted into it, and ſee all the glories of that place, and the pleaſures and delights of that ſtate.) All this, I ſay, would ſignify no more to make a bad man *happy,* than heaps of gold and diamonds, and concerts of the moſt delicious muſick, and a well-ſpread table, and a rich and coſtly bed, would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone; becauſe the man hath *that* within which torments him, and till *that* be removed, he cannot poſſibly be at eaſe. The man's ſpirit is out of order, and off the hinges, and toſt from its center; and till that be ſet right, and reſtored to its proper place and ſtate by goodneſs and holineſs, the man will be perpetually reſtleſs, and cannot poſſibly have any eaſe or peace in his mind: For how can there be peace, how can there be *happineſs* to him, who is of a temper directly oppoſite to it? *The wicked,* ſaith the Prophet, *Iſa.* lvii. 20, 21. *is like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt.* So long as there is impurity in our hearts, and guilt upon our conſciences, they will be reſtleſſly working; *there is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* The *Hebrew* word which we tranſlate *peace,* ſignifies *all kind of happineſs*; there can be no *felicity* to a bad man. The conſideration whereof ſhould put us upon the moſt ſerious and earneſt endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The divine nature is the only perfect idea of *happineſs,* and nothing but our conformity to it can make us *happy.*

I have been ſo long upon this argument, on purpoſe to convince men of the neceſſity of holineſs and goodneſs, and all other virtues, to our preſent and future *happineſs.* They underſtand not the nature of *happineſs,* who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it in any other way. The author and the fountain of *happineſs,* he that made us, and alone can made us *happy,* cannot make us ſo in any other way, than by planting in us ſuch a diſpoſition of mind, as is in truth *a participation of the divine nature,* and by endowing us with ſuch qualities as are the neceſſary materials and ingredients of *happineſs.* There is no way to partake of the *felicity* of *God, bleſſed for ever,* but by becoming holy and righteous, good and merciful, as he is.

All men naturally deſire *happineſs,* and ſeek after it, and are, as they think, travelling towards it, but generally they miſtake their way. Many are eager in the purſuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleaſures, and riches, and honour, as if *theſe* could make them *happy*; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and ſhadows, and that there is no real and ſubſtantial *felicity* in them. *Many ſay, Who will ſhew us any good?* meaning the good things of this world, *corn, and wine, and oil:* But wouldeſt thou be *happy* indeed, endeavour to be like the *pattern of happineſs,* and the *fountain* of it; addreſs thy ſelf to him in the prayer of the Pſalmiſt, *Lord, lift thou up upon me the light of thy countenance, and that ſhalt put more joy and gladneſs into my heart,* than the men of the world can have, *when their corn and their wine increaſeth.*

Many ſay, *lo here!* and *lo there!* that *happineſs* is in a great place, or in a plentiful eſtate, or in the enjoyment of ſenſual pleaſures and delights; but *believe them not*; *happineſs* is ſomething that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is *within thee, in thine heart,* and in the very inward frame and diſpoſition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be *happy,* we muſt be *like the bleſſed God,* we muſt be *holy,* and *merciful,* and *good,* and *juſt, as he is,* and then we are ſecure of his favour; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, and his countenance will behold*

hold the upright. Then we ſhall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleaſure in communion with him, becauſe we ſhall be like him. For the ſureſt foundation of love and friendſhip is a ſimilitude of temper and diſpoſition; every thing naturally affects its own likeneſs, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it, and gladly runs into the embraces of it. God and man muſt be like one another, before they can take pleaſure in one another; if we be unlike to God, it is in the nature of the thing impoſſible that we ſhould be *happy* in one another, and therefore there muſt be a change either in God or us, to bring about this likeneſs. The nature of God is inflexible, fix'd, and unchangeable; therefore change thy ſelf, ſinner, and endeavour to be like God; for ſince he cannot depart from his holineſs and purity, thou muſt leave thy ſins, and *be holy as he is holy,* if ever thou hopeſt to be *happy,* as *he is: Every man that hath this hope in him,* muſt *purify himſelf, even as he is pure.*

Now to this happy and only potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, and dwelleth in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath ſeen, or can ſee; to him be honour and power everlaſting. Amen.

SERMON LXXIX.

The Unchangeableneſs of GOD.

JAMES i. 17.

With whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

The whole Period runs thus:

Do not err, my beloved brethren: Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.

THE connexion and dependance of theſe words upon the former is briefly this; the Apoſtle had aſſerted before, that God is not the author of ſin and evil, *ver.* 13, 14. *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God is not tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own luſt, and enticed:* And here in the text he aſſerts, that God is the fountain and author of all good; *Do not err, my beloved brethren*; as if he had ſaid, Do not miſtake me, though ſin and evil be not from God, but from ourſelves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from God, and not from ourſelves, though we be the authors of the ſins we commit, yet we are not ſo of the good that we do, *that is* from God; *Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* Sin, which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from God, but wholly from ourſelves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from ourſelves, but from God; we are neither inclin'd to that which is good, nor are able of ourſelves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from God, who is the fountain of goodneſs and perfection, and can never be otherwiſe, and can never change nor ceaſe to be ſo, *for with him is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.*

Every good gift, and every perfect gift; all that goodneſs, and all thoſe degrees of perfection, which are in the creatures, in the higheſt angels or ſaints, in the beſt of the ſons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodneſs or happineſs in any of them, *is from above,* that is, from heaven; it is *the gift of God,* and *cometh down* from that perfect, good, and glorious being, whom the apoſtle here calls *the Father of lights*; in alluſion to the ſun, which is a kind of univerſal benefactor to the world, and liberally diſpenſeth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below; but then there is this difference, the ſun changeth its habitudes and poſitions in reference to us, and varies its ſhadows; it riſeth and ſets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwiſe with this intellectual and immaterial ſun, *the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning*, παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, which are all aſtronomical words; the firſt, παραλλαγὴ, ſignifies the various habitudes and poſitions wherein the ſun appears to us every day, at its riſing, in the meridian, and when it ſets; τροπὴ is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly courſe of the ſun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or ſouthern tropicks; and hence it is that it caſts ſeveral ſhadows to people in ſeveral countries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποσκίασμα, *caſting of ſhadows*, being joined with τροπὴ, ſignifies the variation of the ſhadows according to the courſe and motion of the ſun.

But God is an eternal ſpring of light, which never riſeth or ſets, which hath no mixture of ſhadow nor darkneſs, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the ſame free and liberal diſpenſer of good things to his creatures; *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning*; which words ſignify *the immutable perfection and goodneſs of the divine nature*; which ſhall (by God's aſſiſtance) be the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe; in which I ſhall proceed in this method:

Firſt, I ſhall briefly explain what is meant by the *immutability*, or *unchangeableneſs* of the divine nature.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew that this is a perfection eſſential to God, to be *immutably* what he is, that is, *good* and *perfect*.

Thirdly, I ſhall anſwer an objection which lies againſt it, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture of *God's repenting himſelf*. And,

Fourthly, Apply the conſideration of it to ourſelves.

I. For the explication of it. By the *immutability* of God, we mean, that he always is, and was, and to all eternity will be the ſame; that he undergoes no changes either of his eſſence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the *unchangeableneſs* of his *being*, he is ſaid to be *eternal*, *incorruptible*, *and only to have immortality*. In reference to his *perfections*, he is always the ſame infinitely wiſe, and good, and powerful, and holy, and juſt being; from whence it follows, that he is conſtant and immutable in all his decrees and councils, his purpoſes and promiſes. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all thoſe qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purpoſes, reſolutions, and actions; we are continually growing or decreaſing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extreme to another, from that which is more perfect, to the contrary; now knowing, and then ignorant; ſometimes wiſe, and oftner fooliſh, ſtronger and weaker, better or worſe, as it happens, and as we order ourſelves, continually waxing or waining in our knowledge, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purpoſes, and break our promiſes, and contradict our firmeſt and moſt ſerious reſolutions, and ſpeak a thing and do it not, ſay it and do not bring it to paſs; but God is everlaſtingly the ſame in all his perfections, conſtant to his intentions, ſteady to his purpoſes, immutably fixed and perſevering in all his decrees and reſolutions. I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed, namely, to ſhew that this *perfection* is eſſential to God, to be *unchangeably* what he is. And this I ſhall endeavour to make manifeſt both from natural reaſon, and from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon, which tells us, that nothing argues greater weakneſs and imperfection than inconſtancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one ſtate; this is the vanity of the world in general, that *the faſhion of it paſſeth away*; and of man in particular, that he is liable to ſo many natural changes, by age, and diſeaſes, and death; for which reaſon, he is ſaid by the Pſalmiſt, to be, *in his beſt eſtate, altogether vanity*; and that he is liable to ſo many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his underſtanding, and to alter his opinion ſo often, to be ſo

fickle in his will, and to change ſo often his purpoſes and reſolutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute change and inconſtancy to perſons of the weakeſt age and underſtanding; as children, who are liable to be *toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind,* as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Eph.* iv. 14.

Now if the divine nature were ſubject to change, this would caſt an univerſal cloud upon all the divine perfections, and obſcure all other excellencies, and make them *like the flower of the field,* which, how gay and glorious ſoever, is fading and periſhing; and the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be; for as *the corruption of the beſt things is the worſt,* ſo the better any thing is, ſo much the worſe it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And as mutability in God would darken all his other perfections, ſo would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion; the ground of our faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and eſteem of God, would be quite taken away. We could have no great honour or eſteem for a being that is fickle and inconſtant; if his power and juſtice were uncertain, his threatenings would in a great meaſure loſe their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulneſs could fail, no promiſes and declarations, how gracious ſoever, would be any ſecurity or firm ground of truſt and confidence.

And this reaſoning is not the reſult of *divine revelation,* but clearly founded in the *natural* notions and ſuggeſtions of our minds, as will appear by citing one or two teſtimonies to this purpoſe, of thoſe who had no other guide but natural light. *Plato,* in his *Phædo,* enquires, “ Whether the moſt perfect (that is God) be always “ the ſame, or ſometimes thus, and ſometimes otherwiſe? that is (ſaith he) Whether “ that which is equality and goodneſs and bounty itſelf, receives any the leaſt “ change at any time, and be not conſtant and uniform, and of itſelf always the “ ſame, Καὶ οὐδαμῆ οὐδαμῶς ἀλλόιωσιν οὐδεμίαν ἐνδέχεται, and is never in any wiſe, upon “ any account, ſubject to any change or alteration whatſoever?” To which he anſwers, “ That it is neceſſary that he ſhould be the ſame always alike.” And *lib.* 2. *de Repub.* where he lays down the fundamental laws and conſtitutions of religion, he mentions theſe *two,* (which, one would almoſt think, he borrowed from Saint *James,* but that he lived ſo long before him), *viz.* Firſt, “ That God is the cauſe “ of all good, and in no wiſe of any evil:” anſwerably to what our apoſtle here aſſerts, that *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that every good and perfect gift is from him.* Secondly, “ That God doth not deceive us, “ by making various repreſentations of himſelf to us; ſometimes in one form, and “ ſometimes in another; for he is unchangeable, and always the ſame, and cannot, “ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν, paſs out of his own idea, or be any other than what he is:” Which he further confirms by this excellent reaſoning, “ That which is the beſt and “ moſt perfect being is not liable to any alteration; but ſuch a being is God, and “ therefore he cannot be changed by any thing that is weaker and leſs perfect than “ himſelf, and he cannot will to change himſelf; for if he ſhould, it muſt either “ be for the better, or for the worſe: it cannot be for the better; for being already “ poſſeſs'd of all perfection, there can be no acceſſion of any to him by any change; “ and certainly there is no wiſe being, as God is, that will change for the worſe;” and therefore he concludes, Κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν μένει ἀεὶ ἁπλῶς, καὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ μορφῇ, “ That being the goodlieſt and beſt being that is poſſible, he always “ continues ſimply the ſame.” *Seneca* likewiſe, ſpeaking of the immutability of God's counſels, *lib.* 6. *Benef. Statuerunt,* ſays he, *quæ non mutarint, neque unquam primi concilii deos pænitet;* “ The gods make unchangeable decrees, and never repent “ them of their firſt counſel.”

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the divine revelation of the holy ſcriptures, which tell us, that God is *unchangeable* in his nature, and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purpoſes, and promiſes: In his *eſſence* and *being,* Exod. iii. 14. *I am that I am;* this is his name, whereby he made known himſelf to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the *Egyptians* their oppreſſors: *Pſal.* xc. 2. *From everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God.* Pſal. cii. 27. *Thou art the ſame, and thy years fail not.* Mal. iii. 6. *I am the Lord, and change not.* Hence it is that the title of *the living God* is ſo frequently attributed to him; and he ſwears by this, as denoting not only his *eternity,* but his *unchangeableneſs; As I live, ſaith the Lord.* Hither likewiſe we may refer thoſe texts where he is called the *incorrup-*

tible God, Rom. i. 23. *The immortal king*, 1 Tim. i. 17. and is ſaid *only to have immortality*, 1 Tim. vi. 16. And he is immutable likewiſe in his *perfections*; hence it is ſo often ſaid in the *Pſalms*, that *his goodneſs* and *his mercy endure for ever*; *his righteouſneſs* is likewiſe ſaid *to endure for ever*. Pſal. cxi. 3. and Pſal. xxxvi. 6. to be *like the great mountains*; not only *viſible* and *conſpicuous*, but *firm* and *immoveable*; and the ſame likewiſe is ſaid of his *truth* and *faithfulneſs*, Pſal. cxvii. 2. *His truth endureth for ever*; and of his *power*, Iſa. xxvi. 4. *In the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

And ſo likewiſe in his *decrees* and *purpoſes and promiſes*, Pſal. xxxiii. 11. *The counſel of the Lord ſtandeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.* Iſa. xiv. 24. *Surely as I have thought, ſo ſhall it come to paſs; and as I have purpoſed, ſo ſhall it ſtand.* Numb. xxiii. 19. *God is not a man, that he ſhould lie, or as the ſon of man, that he ſhould repent: hath he ſpoken, and ſhall not he do it? hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not he bring it to paſs?* If he hath made any promiſe, or entered into any covenant with us, it is *firm* and *immutable*, Pſal. lxxxix. 33. *He will not ſuffer his faithfulneſs to fail, his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips.* His covenant and his promiſe are in themſelves immutable; but for our further aſſurance, God hath given us his oath, the higheſt ſign of immutability; ſo the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *chap.* vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, (viz.* his *promiſe* and his *oath) in which it is impoſſible for God to lie, we might have ſtrong conſolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope which is ſet before us.* I proceed to the

III^{d} thing I promiſed, which is, To anſwer an objection, which may ſeem to lie againſt what hath been ſaid, from the mention ſo often made in ſcripture, of *God's repenting himſelf*, as *Gen.* vi. 6. where it is ſaid, that *it repented God that he had made man.* 1 Sam. xv. 11. that *he repented that he had made Saul king*. And 2 *Sam.* xxiv. 16. when *the angel had ſtretched out his hand over Jeruſalem to deſtroy it*, it is ſaid, that *the Lord repented him of the evil*. And *Pſal.* cxxxv. 14. the Lord ſaith there, that *he will repent himſelf concerning his ſervants*.

To all which I anſwer, That this expreſſion of *God's repentance*, we are to underſtand (as many others in ſcripture) after the manner of men, and as ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation to our weakneſs and capacity, and not as caſting any imputation of mutability and inconſtancy upon God; as if out of levity, or for want of foreſight, he did alter his mind: but when God is ſaid *to repent that he made man*, or *that he made Saul king*, the change was not in *him*, but *them*; and it ſignifies, not that God was abſolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reaſonable expectation; and therefore the ſcripture cloaths God with the human paſſion of *repenting* and *grieving* for what he had done, as men uſe to do when they are greatly diſappointed and fall ſhort of their expectation.

And as for the other inſtances, wherein God is ſaid *to repent him of evils threatened*; the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which ſeemed to us to have been his peremptory purpoſe and reſolution; that is, he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatenings ſeemed openly to expreſs, becauſe of ſome tacit condition implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from the *conſtancy* and *immutability* of God: for when God did threaten, he ſpake what he did really purpoſe and intend, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened, upon which he was reſolved at that time when he threatened, to be taken off, and to ſtay his hand: and in thus doing, God doth not *mutare conſilium, ſed ſententiam*; *he doth not change his inward counſel and purpoſe, but takes off the ſentence*, which was paſſed with *reſerved conditions*, and *unknown to us*, on purpoſe to urge us the more effectually to repentance.

And that God uſually reſerves ſuch conditions, not only in his threatenings, but ſometimes alſo in his promiſes, appears from that remarkable text, *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them: at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my ſight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent* *of the good wherewith I ſaid I would benefit them.* And from this very conſideration, the ſame Prophet encourageth the people to repentance, *Jer.* xxvi. 13. *Therefore now amend your ways, and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced againſt you.* And we have a famous inſtance of this in the caſe of *Nineveh,* the deſtruction whereof within forty days after, God had openly proclaimed by his Prophet; yet he ſtops the execution of the ſentence, upon their repentance, *Jonah.* iii. 10. *The men of Nineveh turned from their evil ways, and the Lord repented of the evil he ſaid he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

All that now remains, is to apply this doctrine of the *immutability of the divine nature* to ourſelves; and the conſideration of it may ſerve to ſeveral good purpoſes, both in reference to bad and good men.

Firſt, in regard to ſinners and wicked men.

And, *Firſt,* The *unchangeableneſs of God,* is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the ſinner conſider what God is, and the conſideration of his *unchangeable nature* muſt needs terrify him: *He is a holy God, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,* Hab. i. 13. *He is not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him: The fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in his ſight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity,* Pſal. v. 4, 5. *He is* likewiſe *a juſt God, and will by no means clear the guilty,* nor *let ſin go unpuniſhed,* Exod. xxxiv. 7. *He is alſo omnipotent,* and able to execute the vengeance threatened againſt ſinners. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger,* Pſal. xc. 11. *Thou, even thou art to be feared; and who may ſtand in thy ſight when once thou art angry?* Pſal. lxxvi. 7. *Strong is the Lord God who judgeth,* Rev. xviii. 8. And, which gives a ſad accent to all this, he that is thus holy, and juſt, and powerful, continues *for ever the ſame,* and will never alter or put off any of theſe properties, will never ceaſe to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent ſinners: And is it not *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of* this holy, and juſt, and omnipotent *God who lives for ever,* and can *puniſh for ever?* Let all obſtinate ſinners hear this, and tremble: You cannot be more obſtinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily reſolved to make you miſerable. If you be determined upon a ſinful courſe; God is alſo determined how he will deal with you, that *he will not ſpare,* but *that his anger and jealouſy ſhall ſmoke againſt you,* and that *all the curſes that are written in his book ſhall light upon you,* and that *he will blot out your name from under heaven*; he hath *ſworn in his wrath, that* unbelieving and impenitent ſinners *ſhall not enter into his reſt:* And for the greater aſſurance of the thing, and that we may not think that there is any condition implied in theſe threatenings, he hath confirmed them by *an oath*; that by this *immutable ſign, in which it is impoſſible for God to lie,* ſinners might have *ſtrong terrors,* and not be able to *fly* to any, in hopes of *refuge.*

Secondly, The conſideration of God's *unchangeableneſs,* ſhould likewiſe be a very powerful argument to urge ſinners to repentance. If they will but leave their ſins, and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them, upon their repentance and ſubmiſſion; for *he is a God gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger, and ready to forgive*; he is *unchangeably good,* and *his mercy endureth for ever:* but if they will not come in, and ſubmit to theſe terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and deſtruction; nothing then *remains but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, to conſume them.* God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace: and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant: there is a perfect and eternal oppoſition between the holy nature of God, and an impenitent ſinner; and it is impoſſible ſuch an one ſhould be happy, till this oppoſition be removed; and to do that, there are but *two* ways imaginable, by *changing God,* or by *changing ourſelves.* The nature of *God is fixed and unalterable*; God cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore *we* muſt depart from our ſinful and corrupt nature. God cannot quit his holineſs; therefore we muſt leave our ſins: we can have no hope *to change God,* therefore we muſt *change ourſelves.* Rectify, ſinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy luſts; do not venture upon impoſſibilities; rather think of altering *thy ſinful nature,* which *may be changed,* than of altering *the divine nature,* which is *eſſentially immutable, with whom is* *no variableneſs, nor ſhadow of turning.* God hath once condeſcended ſo far, as *to take our nature upon him*, to make us capable of happineſs: but if this will not do, he can go no lower; he will not, he cannot *put off his own nature*, to make us happy.

Secondly, In reference to good men, the conſideration of God's *unchangeableneſs*, is matter of great conſolation to them; in all the changes and viciſſitudes of the world, their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, *the rock of ages*, as the expreſſion is in the prophet *Iſaiah*, chap. xxvi. 4. it relies upon the *unchangeable* goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God, *all whoſe promiſes are yea, and amen*, truth and certainty. All other ſupports and hopes may fail us; but *God will not ſuffer his faithfulneſs to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of his lips*, as the Pſalmiſt aſſures us, *Pſal.* lxxxix. 33. Men may break their word, and be leſs than their promiſes; but *God is faithful, who hath promiſed to give grace and glory, and to with-hold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. He is not as man, that he ſhould lie, or as the ſon of man, that he ſhould repent. Hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not do it? Hath he ſaid it, and ſhall not he bring it to paſs?*

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in God, it is uſually on the *merciful* ſide, as when he ſtops the execution of his threatenings, upon the repentance of a ſinful nation, as in that remarkable text which I mentioned before, *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8. *At what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them:* And ſo likewiſe when his faithful people and ſervants are in great diſtreſs, and there is no viſible help and means of relief; in this caſe likewiſe God is ſaid *to repent*; and to appear for their reſcue, *Deut.* xxxii. 36. *The Lord ſhall judge his people, and repent himſelf for his ſervants, when he ſeeth that their power is gone.*

Thus we ſhould comfort ourſelves in the greateſt extremities, with the conſideration of the *immutable* goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God. The things of the world are mutable, and the men of the world; even thoſe things which ſeem moſt conſtant, as the heavens; and to be ſettled upon the ſureſt foundations, as the earth; yet theſe ſhall be changed: *Pſal.* cii. 25, 26, 27. *Of old haſt thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they ſhall periſh, but thou ſhalt endure; all of them ſhall wax old like a garment; as a veſture ſhalt thou change them, and they ſhall be changed: but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall have no end.* From whence the Pſalmiſt infers this comfort to the church and people of God, *ver.* 28. *The children of thy ſervants ſhall continue, and their ſeed ſhall be eſtabliſhed before thee.*

Nothing that is mutable can be a ſolid foundation of comfort and confidence. Men are inconſtant, and riches are uncertain, and all other things which men commonly truſt to; and therefore the apoſtle *chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to truſt in uncertain riches, but in the living God.* He only that *lives for ever*, is a firm foundation of hope and confidence.

When God would comfort the *Iſraelites* in *Egypt* under their great oppreſſion, he bids *Moſes* only to declare to them his *immutability*, Exod. iii. 14. *Say unto them*, I AM THAT I AM *hath ſent me unto you.* And this is the great comfort of Chriſtians, that *he* who is *their ſaviour*, and *their hope*, is *the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever: he that was, and that is, and that is to come*, in all durations the ſame.

We are continually changing, and are not the ſame we were; ſome of us were young, and now are old; once, perhaps, flouriſhed in great proſperity, but now are poor and needy; were once ſtrong and healthful, but now ſickly and weak: It ſhould comfort us in all theſe changes, that *God is ſtill the ſame*, and he alone is inſtead of all other comforts and ſupports: when all other things fail, we may *rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our ſalvation.* Youth, and health, and riches, and friends may forſake us; but God hath promiſed, that *he will never leave us, nor forſake us*; that *he will not leave us when we are old, nor forſake us when our ſtrength faileth*; when *our ſtrength fails*, and *our heart fails*, then is he *the ſtrength of our hearts*, and *our portion for ever*; and when our great change ſhall come, and the terrors of death ſhall take hold of us, we have ſtill the ſame comfort, *the Lord liveth, and bleſſed be the God of our ſalvation.*

In a word, the conſideration of God's *immutability*, ſhould keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be ſtartled and ſurprized at them; according to that of the Pſalmiſt, *He ſhall not be afraid of evil tidings, becauſe his heart is fixed, truſting in God.* This ſhould make us conſtant to him and his truth, *ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as we know that our labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord*; it ſhould make us *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*, in full aſſurance that God *will be as good to us as his word*, and in a firm *hope* and perſuaſion *of that eternal life which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed.*

SERMON LXXX.

The KNOWLEDGE of GOD.

1 SAM. ii. 3.

The Lord is a God of knowledge.

I COME now to ſpeak of thoſe properties and perfections which relate to the divine underſtanding, and will, and manner, and power of acting. *Knowledge* conſiders things abſolutely, and in themſelves: *Wiſdom* conſiders the reſpects and relations of things one to another, and under the notion of means and ends. The *knowledge* of God, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their powers, and qualities, and circumſtances; the *wiſdom* of God, is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition; of their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. The *knowledge* of God, only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his *wiſdom*, implies the ſkill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, to make every thing, and to govern and adminiſter all things in number, weight, and meaſure. I ſhall at preſent ſpeak of the *firſt* of theſe, the *knowledge* of God; which, as I ſaid, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their nature: of the powers, and qualities, and circumſtances of things.

Theſe words ſignify God to be *the fountain of knowledge*; that is, that he poſſeſſeth it himſelf, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this, I ſhall,

Firſt, Endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to God.

Secondly, Shew the perfection and the prerogatives of the divine *knowledge*.

Thirdly, Draw ſome practical inferences from the whole.

Firſt, For the proof of it, I ſhall attempt it *two* ways.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon.

2. From ſcripture or divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon. I begin with this firſt; becauſe, unleſs this be eſtabliſhed, all divine revelation falls to the ground; unleſs natural reaſon aſſures us, that God is endowed with *knowledge* and *underſtanding*, it is in vain to enquire after divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requiſite on the part of the revealer, *ability*, and *integrity*; that he have a perfect *knowledge* and *underſtanding* of the thing which he reveals, ſo that he cannot be deceived himſelf; and ſo much goodneſs and truth, that he will not deceive us. Now unleſs our reaſon aſſure us that God is endowed with *knowledge* and *underſtanding*, the *firſt* condition is evidently wanting, *viz. ability*, and conſequently the *ſecond*, *integrity*; for there cannot be goodneſs and veracity without *knowledge*.

This being premiſed, I proceed to the Proof of it from ſuch arguments as our natural reaſon ſuggeſts to us. I have formerly told you, that the divine *perfections* are not to be proved by way of *demonſtration*, but by way of *conviction*, by ſhewing the abſurdities and inconveniencies of the contrary; for if we deny knowledge to God, we muſt deny it to be a perfection; we muſt deny it to be in any of the creatures; we muſt attribute many other imperfections to God; all which are abſurd to our natural reaſon; for natural reaſon dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the denial of it to God will argue many other imperfections in the divine nature; now theſe are ſo many arguments which natural reaſon offers to us to prove, that *knowledge belongs to God*.

1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to God. Natural reaſon tells us, though the ſcripture had not ſaid it, that *knowledge excels ignorance as much as light doth darkneſs*; now whatever is *perfect* and *excellent* is to be attributed to the divine nature; for this is the *firſt* notion we have of God, that he is *a being abſolutely perfect*.

2. Knowledge is to be found in ſome of the creatures, and therefore is much more in God the Creator, becauſe it is derived from him. Our very underſtandings whereby we know God, or any thing elſe, are an argument that *knowledge* and *underſtanding* are in God. If *he gives wiſdom to the wiſe, and knowledge to them that know underſtanding*, if he communicates this perfection to the creatures, he himſelf is much more poſſeſſed of it. The ſcripture indeed uſeth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reaſon doth ſuggeſt to the moſt brutiſh and ignorant of men. *Pſal.* xciv. 8, 9, 10. *Underſtand, ye brutiſh among the people; and ye fools when will ye be wiſe? He that planted the ear, ſhall he not hear? He that formed the eye, ſhall he not ſee?*

3. The denial of this *perfection* to God, argues many other imperfections in the divine nature. Nothing would more eclipſe the divine nature, than to take away this *perfection* from it; this would bring an univerſal obſcurity upon God's other perfections; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn *the brightneſs of the morning* into *the ſhadow of death*. If we remove this *perfection* from God, we deny his *wiſdom*. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or ſuit one thing to another: And we weaken his *power*. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would *power* be without *knowledge*? What irregular things would it produce? What untoward combinations of effects would there be, if *infinite power* were let looſe to act without the conduct of *knowledge* and *underſtanding*? And, conſequently, we take away his *providence*; for without *knowledge* there can be no counſel, no fore-caſt of events, no proviſion for the future, no government of the world. And this is not all; for without *knowledge* there could be no ſuch thing as *goodneſs*; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind neceſſity. There could be no *veracity*, nor *juſtice*, nor *mercy* in God; for all theſe ſuppoſe *knowledge*. He that ſpeaks truth, muſt know it; he that is juſt, muſt underſtand right from wrong; he that ſhews mercy, muſt know who are miſerable, and how they may be relieved, and not to labour in a thing ſo plain and eaſy: Take away the *knowledge* of God, and you render him incapable of any *honour* from his creatures; for if he know not what honour we do him, it is loſt labour to give him any. And that we may ſee theſe are the deductions of natural reaſon, without the advantage of revelation, we ſhall find the heathens, who were deſtitute of divine revelation, did attribute this perfection to God, *Tully* tells us, that *Thales* was wont to ſay, *Deos omnia cernere*; and we know the heathens were wont to ſwear, *Diis immortalibus teſtibus interpoſitis*, which is an owning of his *omniſcience: Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curioſum & negotii plenum deum?* De Nat. Deor. l. 1.

2. From ſcripture, and divine revelation. I will not heap up all thoſe teſtimonies of ſcripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument; I will only inſtance in two or three: *Job* xxxvi. 4. *He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee.* —— xxxvii. 16. *Doſt thou know the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?*

Hither we may refer thoſe texts which repreſent God by way of condeſcenſion to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which ſignify his *knowledge* of what is done in the world; and thoſe which ſpeak of him, as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; *he giveth wiſdom to the wiſe, and underſtanding to them that know underſtanding*, Dan. ii. 21. And thoſe which ſpeak of God, as knowing the moſt ſecret things, *the hidden things of darkneſs*, the hearts and the thoughts of men; and thoſe things which are at the greateſt diſtance, as future things; and of the greateſt uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of theſe I ſhall particularly conſider; for in proving that God knows all theſe, his *knowledge* of all other things will be proved with advantage: for if any thing be out of the reach of the *divine underſtanding*, it muſt in all probability be either thoſe things which are ſecret and hidden, as men's ſecret actions, or their thoughts; or elſe thoſe things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cauſe, as future contingencies: and the proving of this may be of great uſe to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion, and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

Firſt of theſe, *viz.* That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even thoſe that are moſt ſecret. And in the handling of this, I ſhall ſpeak diſtinctly to theſe *three* things.

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions; *his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he ſeeth all his goings*, Job xxxiv. 21.

2. That he is a curious obſerver of them; *he ſeeth all his goings, he marks all his ſteps,* takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of thoſe actions which are moſt ſecret and hidden; *there is no darkneſs nor ſhadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themſelves*, Job xxxiv. 22.

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two teſtimonies to this purpoſe. *Tully* lays down this principle, as that which makes men regular and orderly, and fit for ſociety; *Sit igitur hoc perſuaſum civibus qualis quiſque ſit, quid agat, quid in ſe admittat deos intueri.* *Socrates*, as *Xenophon* tells us, was wont to ſay, πάντα θεοὺς εἰδέναι τά τε λεγόμενα καὶ πραττόμενα καὶ τὰ σιγῇ βουλευόμενα. *Arrian* in his diſcourſe upon *Epictetus*, tell us, it is neceſſary that every one ſhould be perſuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐφορᾶται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, *that every thing that is done by men is ſeen of God.*

The ſcripture frequently mentions this, *Pſal.* cxxxix. 1, *&c.* *Prov.* v. 21. *The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* Jer. xxxii. 19. *Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the ſons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

2. He is a curious obſerver, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. *Job* ſaith, *he ſeeth all our ſteps*; and *Solomon*, that *he pondereth all our goings*; the word is, *he weighs them in a balance.* So 1 Sam. ii. 3. *The Lord is a God of knowledge, by him actions are weighed.* Job xxxi. 4. *Doth he not ſee my ways, and count all my ſteps?* Which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactneſs of God's knowledge; he knows the quality of our actions, and all the circumſtances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them, whatever may commend an action, or blemiſh it, whatever may aggravate a ſin, or excuſe it. *Iſai.* xxvi. 7. *Thou moſt upright, doth weigh the path of the juſt.* There's not a good word that we ſpeak, but God hears it, *Mal.* iii. 16. *And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him*; and all we do is *noted in his book*, Pſal. lvi. 8.

3. He takes notice of thoſe actions which are moſt ſecret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we *do our alms in ſecret*, when we *enter into our cloſets and ſhut the doors, our father ſeeth in ſecret*, Mat. vi. Nor can we retire ourſelves to any place, where we can ſin ſo as God ſhall not ſee us, where we can hide our ſins from his ſight, or ourſelves from his wrath. Hear how ſenſibly a heathen ſpeaks of this; ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκότος ἔνδον ποιήσητε, μέμνησθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνοι ἐστέ: οὐ γὰρ ἐστέ, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, καὶ τίς τούτοις χρεία φωτὸς εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τί ποιεῖτε; *Arrian* in Ep. l. 1. c. 14.

The ſcripture is full of teſtimonies to this purpoſe, *Pſal.* xc. 8. *Thou haſt ſet our iniquities before thee, and our ſecret ſins in the light of thy countenance*; thoſe ſins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the divine knowledge, *darkneſs and light are all one to him*; Pſal. cxxxix. 11, 12. Jer. xvi. 17, xxiii. 24. *Can any hide himſelf in ſecret places, that I ſhall not ſee him.*

II. God knows the hearts and thoughts of men; which implies theſe *two* things;

Firſt, His perfect knowledge of them.

Secondly, That this is his peculiar prerogative.

Firſt, God perfectly knows the hearts of men, *Jer.* xvii. 10. *I the Lord, ſearch the heart and try the reins*; where, by *heart and reins*, which are the moſt inwards parts of the body, and lie leaſt open to diſcovery, are ſignified the moſt ſecret thoughts and motions of the ſoul; theſe God is ſaid to *ſearch* and *try*, not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to ſignify to us the perfection and exactneſs of the divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they ſearch into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; ſo God is ſaid *to ſearch the heart*, to ſignify to us that he knows the hearts of men as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the ſtricteſt ſearch and moſt diligent examination; upon the ſame account he is ſaid elſewhere in ſcripture *to weigh the ſpirits of men*, Prov. xvi. 2. *All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the ſpirits*; that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the ſecret motions and inclinations of mens hearts, as men have of thoſe things which they weigh in a balance, with the greateſt exactneſs.

Now that God hath this perfect knowledge of mens hearts, the ſcripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all men, 1 *Kings* viii. 39. *For thou, even thou, knoweſt the hearts of all the children of men*, 1 Chron. xxviii 9. *The Lord ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* How cloſe and reſerved ſoever men may be, what diſguiſe ſoever they may uſe to hide their purpoſes from men, yet God ſees them; the things which are moſt dark and ſecret are open to his view. *Pſal.* xliv. 21. *He knoweth the ſecrets of the hearts.* Prov. xv. 11. *Hell and deſtruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the children of men?* Whatever pretences men may make, God ſees through them, and diſcovers the very intentions of their hearts. *Pſal.* vii. 9. *The righteous Lord trieth the heart and reins.* Heb. iv. 13. It is ſaid there of *the word of God*, that it is *a diſcerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all things are naked, and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do, and there is no creature that is not manifeſt in his ſight*; nay, he knows our thoughts at a diſtance, what they will be, before any actually are. *Pſal* cxxxix. 2. *Thou knoweſt my thoughts afar off.* 'Tis true indeed every man is conſcious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are preſent, and when they are paſt, if he have not forgot them; but no man knows what he ſhall think to-morrow; but this God knows; for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do ourſelves; *God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things*, 1 John iii. 20.

And though the ſcripture had not revealed this ſo plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of God; the reaſon of our minds tells us, that God knows our hearts; and the fears and jealouſies of our minds are an evidence of it.

1ſt, The reaſon of every man's mind tells him, that the ſupreme being whom we call God, is endowed with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that *he excels in knowledge*; and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extend itſelf to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of God, in reſpect of all objects, is like the ſun in reſpect of this lower world; *nothing is hid from the light of it.* We have naturally this apprehenſion of God, that he is an immenſe being, every where preſent; that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and conſequently that he is preſent to our ſpirits, and ſees all the motions of our minds, and diſcerns the very ſecrets of our hearts; and there can be no ſuch thing as ſecrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And to convince us that theſe are the dictates of natural reaſon, without the help and aſſiſtance of divine revelation, we ſhall find that the heathens, who had only the advantage of natural light, were firmly poſſeſſed with this apprehenſion, that God knows the hearts of men. This may be ſufficiently collected from the frequent ſayings of the wiſer heathens to this purpoſe; that the beſt and moſt acceptable worſhip of the deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this ſenſe, *Tully* ſpeaks, *Cultus autem deorum eſt optimus, idemque caſtiſſimus atque ſanctiſſimus pleniſſimuſque pietatis, ut eos ſemper purâ, integrâ atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*; *The beſt and holieſt worſhip of the gods, is to worſhip them with a pure, and upright, and ſincere mind.* To the ſame purpoſe is that known ſaying of the poet,

Compoſitum jus faſque animi, ſanctoſque receſſus
Mentis, & incoctum generoſo pectus honeſto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis, & farre litabo;

Do but offer to God a mind inwardly reſolved to be juſt and honeſt, and the plaineſt ſacrifice will pleaſe him. Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honeſt diſpoſition of mind, to be moſt acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did moſt firmly believe that God knows the ſecrets of men hearts; otherwiſe there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themſelves this way to the divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by conſequence; there are many expreſs paſſages in their writings, which do ſufficiently ſignify their belief of this *principle*. *Thales*, one of their moſt ancient philoſophers, being aſked, *If an unjuſt man could conceal himſelf from God?* he anſwered, *He cannot ſo much as hide from him the very thoughts and deſign of it.* *Socrates* (as *Xenophon* tells) was wont to inculcate this principle upon his ſcholars, That *the gods know all things, what we ſay, and what we do, and what we think in ſilence.* To the ſame purpoſe, *Arrian* in his diſſertations upon *Epictetus*, laying down the principles of a virtuous life; *Firſt of all,* ſaith he, *we muſt learn this, that there is a God who takes care of the world, and that there is nothing hid from him, not only what we do, but not ſo much as what we think and deſign.* So likewiſe *Tully*, in his book of laws; *Let every man be firmly perſuaded of this; that the gods ſee what every man is, and with what mind and devotion they ſerve them.* I will add but one teſtimony more, and that is of *Seneca* in his epiſtles; *Nihil Deo clauſum eſt, intereſt animis noſtris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit*; *We can keep nothing cloſe from God, for he is preſent to our minds, and intimate to our thoughts*; ſo that you ſee this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reaſon themſelves into it.

(2.) The natural fears of men are likewiſe a ſecret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man's natural actions, and ſuch as happen upon ſurprize, and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate ſenſe of our minds, and do more truly diſcover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate diſcourſe. If I ſee a man upon the ſudden ſight of a ſerpent recoil and ſtart back, though he tell me never ſo often that he is not afraid, yet I am ſufficiently convinced of the contrary, becauſe I ſee in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgment of fear and danger; ſo if men find that upon the deſigning of a ſecret wickedneſs, which never went further than their own hearts, their conſciences do ſting and laſh them; that they have a ſenſe of guilt, and feel inward frights and horrors, whatever they may ſay to the contrary; this is a natural acknowledgment of an inviſible eye that ſees them, and diſallows their wicked deſigns. If that be true which the heathen poet ſays, That

Scelus intra ſe tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet,

He that meditates any ſecret wickedneſs in his heart, is guilty to himſelf, as if he had committed it; this is a plain confeſſion, that the man ſtands in awe of ſomething beſides himſelf, and is jealous that there is one that is conſcious to what he thinks.

2. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of mens hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of God. This is implied in the anſwer to that queſtion, *Who can know the heart of man?* Jer. xvii. 10. *I the Lord ſearch the heart, and try the reins*; this is the prerogative of God, and one of his chief titles, that he is καρδιογνώστης, *a knower of the heart*, 1 Kings viii. 39. *Thou, even thou only knoweſt the hearts of all the children of men.* Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and deſigns of others, from their words and actions; but God only knows them. Men are conſcious to their own thoughts and purpoſes; *the ſpirit of a man that is in him, knows the things of a man*; but they cannot ſee into the ſecrets of another man's mind; it is God alone that knows the hearts of all men; the heart of a man is a privileged place, and the ſecret and inward workings of it are not ſubject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. *The Lord ſeeth not as man ſeeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart*; our knowledge is but ſuperficial, and glides upon the outſide and ſurface of things, but the divine knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkeſt place, the moſt inward retirement, the privateſt cloſet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this God only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium & ſpeculator omnium, à quo nihil ſecretum eſſe poteſt, tenebris intereſt, intereſt & cogitationibus noſtris quaſi alteris tenebris*, ſaith *Min. Fœlix*, *God made all things, and ſees all things, and therefore nothing can be ſecret from him; he is preſent in darkneſs, and he is preſent to the thoughts of men, which are as it were another* and a thicker *darkneſs*.

The devil indeed pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of *Job*'s heart better than God himſelf; and that notwithſtanding the teſtimony which God gave of his integrity; yet if he were but ſoundly tried by affliction, he would renounce God, and curſe him to his face: but the event proved how groundleſs and malicious this ſuggeſtion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the paſſages of ſome divines concerning the devil's immediate acceſs to the minds of men, and his power to caſt wicked thoughts into them; which ſeems by conſequence to grant him ſome knowledge of mens hearts; for by the ſame reaſon that he can imprint thoughts upon mens minds, he may ſee thoſe that are imprinted there.

That the devil is a very ſagacious ſpirit, and can make very ſhrewd conjectures at the bent and inclinations of mens minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and obſervation of our tempers and paſſions, of our intereſts and deſigns, and from the general tenour of our actions in publick and private, and from our prayers and confeſſions to God, (if he permit him at any time to be ſo near good men) I think there is no doubt; but this is far from a knowledge of our hearts; all this is but conjecture, and ſuch as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the buſineſs of caſting blaſphemous and deſpairing thoughts into the minds of men; to this I would ſay theſe *three* things:

1. That there are few of theſe caſes which may not more probably be reſolved into the wickedneſs and infidelity of mens hearts, or into the darkneſs and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raiſe and ſuggeſt ſtrange thoughts to men, and ſuch as we may be apt to think have no riſe from ourſelves, not conſidering what an odd and ſtrange influence the diſorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we ſee in violent fevers, and ſeveral other diſeaſes; and *melancholy*, though the workings of it are more ſtill and quiet, is as truly a *diſeaſe* as any other; ſo that I chuſe rather to aſcribe as much of theſe to a bodily diſtemper as may be, becauſe it is a very uncomfortable conſideration, to think that the devil hath ſuch an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not ſee how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this prerogative of God, which the ſcripture plainly gives him, of being *the only knower of the heart*, that the devil can have ſo immediate an acceſs to our minds, as ro put wicked thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is ſaid, 1 *Chron.* xxi. 1. That *ſatan provoked David to number the people*, and *Luke* xxii. 3. That *the devil entered into Judas*, and *Acts* v. 3. That *ſatan had filled the heart of* Ananias *to lie unto the Holy Ghoſt*; and *Eph.* ii. 2. That *the devil is the ſpirit that worketh*

in the children of diſobedience; I ſay, I cannot think that any, or all of theſe expreſſions do amount to ſuch an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into mens minds; but they only ſignify that the devil hath a greater hand in ſome ſins than others, and that a heart wickedly bent and inclined, give him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully by preſenting the occaſions of ſuch wicked thoughts and actions to them; for it is uſual, in ſcripture phraſe, as to aſcribe all good motions to God's ſpirit, ſo all evil thoughts and actions to the devil, not that he is the immediate cauſe of them, but becauſe he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I ſee no reaſon to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, though not the ſecret thoughts of mens minds; for this ſeems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of mens hearts, and to give him a key to that cloſet which God hath reſerved to himſelf: for it is a very nice diſtinction which is here made between the thoughts of mens minds, and the images of their fancies; and if theſe ſhould happen to be but words that ſignify the ſame thing, we ſhall unawares intrench upon the prerogative of God. Therefore becauſe the ſcripture is a ſtranger to theſe nice and ſubtile diſtinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much ſafer to aſſert the prerogative of God in that latitude that the ſcripture uſeth the word *heart*; for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our ſouls are totally exempted from the immediate cognizance of any other ſpirit but God's alone; and that neither angel nor devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferred in a way of probable conjecture from the particular knowledge of mens tempers, and habits, and deſigns, and the courſe of their actions. I proceed to the

III. Particular; God's knowledge of future events. This God propoſes as the way to diſcern the true God from idols, *Iſaiah* xli. 21, &c. *Produce your cauſe, ſaith the Lord, bring forth your ſtrong reaſons, ſaith the king of Jacob*; that is, let them bring ſome argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he inſtanceth in foretelling future events, *ver.* 22. *Let them ſhew the former things, what they be, that we may conſider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.* God puts it upon this iſſue, if they can *foretel future things*, then they are *gods*; if not, they are *vanity, and a work of naught, and he is an abomination that chuſeth them*, ver. 24. By *things to come*, I underſtand ſuch effects as do not depend upon any neceſſary cauſe, but upon the will of free agents, and ſo may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of God, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I ſhall conſider theſe *two* things:

1. That God knows future events.
2. That he only knows them.

1. God knows future events; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from ſcripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light, as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the beſt part of wiſdom; and unleſs this did belong to God, how could he govern the world? The heathens, except only the *Epicureans*, generally granted this, as appears in thoſe wiſe counſels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpoſe, that we ſhould not be anxious for the future; but having done our endeavour, leave the events of things to God, who only knows them, and diſpoſeth them.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris. Juv.

And afterward, ſaith he, *We are importunate with God for wife and children:*

At illis notum, qui pueri, qualiſque futura ſit uxor. And that this was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from thoſe apprehenſions which they had of *divination*. *Tully* lays down this for a principle, *Deos poſſe nobis ſigna futurarum rerum oſtendere*; de Legibus. And in his book *de Divin.* he tells us, *that there was ſuch a thing as divination; for it was an old opinion, Jam uſque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque* *pop. Rom. & omnium gentium firmata conſenſu:* and afterward, that *this divination was not, ſine inſtinctu afflatúque divino.*

I know they did variouſly explain this, according to their ſeveral opinions about *fate* and *contingency*, and their apprehenſions about the *providence* of God. One ſect of them, the *Stoicks*, held that there was a fatal chain of cauſes from firſt to laſt, and things did neceſſarily follow one another; and by this means they made fore-knowledge eaſy and explicable; and though in their diſputes they ſeem to grant no ſuch things as *events* aud *contingencies*, yet they are agreed in the thing, that thoſe things which *we* call *events*, though *they* would not call them ſo, were fore-known to God. And for this I ſhall only cite one teſtimony of *Seneca*, ſpeaking of God's fore-knowledge of the moſt contingent things, the diſpoſitions of men long before they are born; he adds, *nota eſt enim illis operis ſui ſeries, omniúmque illis rerum per manus ſuas iturarum ſcientia in aperto ſemper eſt; nobis ex abdito ſubit; & quæ repentina putamus, illis proviſa veniunt & familiaria*; and how peremptory ſoever this ſect is in their diſputes about *fate*, yet when they ſpeak of the τὰ ἐφ' ἡμὶν, and generally in their moral diſcourſes, they ſeem plainly to me to exempt *the will of man* from this *fatal neceſſity*.

And thoſe other ſects of the philoſophers that denied *fate*, did generally grant *God's fore-knowledge of contingent things.* I grant indeed, that they did rather make God's fore-knowledge an *arbitrary* and *voluntary*, than *a neceſſary* perfection, that is, that God, when he pleaſed to apply himſelf to it, could fore-know all future events: but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to ſmall and inconſiderable things, ſo neither his fore-knowledge. But *Tully* ſeems to attribute a very perfect providence to him, and a fore-knowledge of the leaſt things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad ſe pertinere putantem, curioſum & negotii plenum Deum?* But I cannot ſay he is conſtant to himſelf: but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleaſed to trouble himſelf with it; and had they not in this miſtaken the nature of God, they might eaſily have apprehended, that it is no trouble nor wearineſs to an infinite underſtanding, that is always in act, to know the leaſt things how many ſoever they be.

2. From ſcripture, which gives us teſtimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Teſtimonies, *Iſa.* xlviii. 3, &c. *Acts* xv. 18. *Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world,* ἀπ' αἰῶνος *from everlaſting*; which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of *Sen. Nota enim illis operis ſui ſeries*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from ſcripture, I will mention but one; the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened, *Gen.* xv. 13. God foretells the children of *Iſrael*'s deliverance after 430 years, which he punctually accompliſhed, *Exod.* xii. 40, 41. The prophet that propheſied againſt the altar at *Bethel*, named the man that ſhould do it, *Joſias*, 350 years before-hand, 1 *Kings* xiii. 2. The deliverance of the children of *Iſrael* from the *babyloniſh* captivity was foretold 100 years before to be done particularly by *Cyrus*; which is ſo ſtrange, that the prophet brings it in with a preface of God's wiſdom and power, *Iſa.* xliv. 24, *&c.* Which was afterward preciſely fulfilled, when the 70 years were expired. How are the life and death of the *Meſſias*, with many particular circumſtances foretold! And did not he foretel the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem* 40 years before?

But becauſe there may be no contingency in good things, God himſelf may be reſolved to effect them, or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you ſhall find that the worſt things have been foretold; the apoſtacy of the children of *Iſrael*, Deut. xxxi. 16. and their infidelity in times of the goſpel, *Iſa.* liii. 1, 5, 9. Our Saviour foretold the treachery of *Judas*, and *Peter*'s denial of him; now theſe are ſo evil, that it were blaſphemy to ſuppoſe the holy God to have any hand in them; and therefore are foretold by him merely by virtue of his *fore-knowledge*, and the *infiniteneſs* of his *underſtanding*, which reacheth things at the greateſt diſtance, that are moſt contingent.

SERMON LXXXI.

Of the KNOWLEDGE of GOD.

1 SAM. II. 3.

The Lord is a God of knowledge.

I Have conſidered this perfection of God, in ſome of the greateſt and moſt difficult inſtances of it, his knowledge of the moſt ſecret things, the hearts of men, and future events; againſt the laſt of which there are ſome objections, which I come now briefly to conſider, and paſs on to what remains.

Object. the *firſt*; The *impoſſibility* of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object; therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true: but future events, which may, or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will or will not be; becauſe they have no certain cauſe; therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Anſw. This I confeſs is the grand difficulty; I ſhall not be ſo ſolicitous to take it away, as to give ſatisfaction to it.

1. I might ſay, with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the uncertainty of the *cauſe*, but of the *object*, which may be certain, though the *cauſe* be contingent. Which I prove thus; whatever event hath actually happened, as becauſe now it is paſt, it is certainly true, that *it was*; ſo becauſe it once was, it was certainly true before it was, that *it would be*; as in *Peter*'s denying of Chriſt. If it be now true, that *he hath denyed him*, it was true before, that *he would deny him*; and it being determinately true, God ſaw it *as it was*; ſo that here is an *object* of a certain knowledge.

2. Though we could not explain the poſſibility of God's knowing future contingencies, much leſs the manner how; yet we are ſufficiently aſſured that God doth know them. I will give but one inſtance for the proof of this Nothing more evident than the ſin of *Adam*; yet God fore-knew this, how elſe was Chriſt *decreed before the foundation of the world?* Chriſt was a remedy upon the occaſion of ſin; now the remedy could not be deſigned before the ſin was foreſeen: and this being certain, *cum conſtat de re, fruſtra inquiritur de modo*; *when we are certain of the thing, 'tis not neceſſary to know the manner.* We are ſatisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the ſoul and body, though no man can explain how a ſpirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that the parts of it hang together, of which whoſoever ſaith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And ſo in many other things; that man doth not know himſelf, nor the meaſure of his own underſtanding, nor the nature and obſcurity of things, that will not confeſs himſelf poſed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many ἀφάνταστα, many things, the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our beſt reaſon and underſtanding can give no account.

3. 'Tis very unreaſonable to expect we ſhould know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties and meaſures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we ſhould be *like God in knowledge*, our underſtandings would be infinite like his; and in this caſe eſpecially it becomes us to put on the modeſty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant ſpirits take it for an affront to their underſtandings, that any one

ſhould expect they ſhould believe any thing, though they have the higheſt aſſurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny God's knowledge of future events, unleſs they may be ſatisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are thoſe who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some ſay, that God ſees future events *in ſpeculo voluntatis*; others ſay, that the eternity of God is actually commenſurate to all duration, as his immenſity to all ſpace, and ſo God doth not ſo properly *fore-ſee* and *fore-know*, as *ſee* and *know* future things by the preſentiality and co-exiſtence of all things in eternity; for they ſay, that future things are actually preſent and exiſting to God, though not in *menſurâ propriâ*, yet in *menſurâ alienâ*: The ſchool-men have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the underſtanding theſe phraſes; but to me they ſeem to ſignify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever ſince, leſt they ſhould ſeem to be ignorant, would ſeem to underſtand; but I wonder moſt, that men, when they have amuſed and puzzled themſelves and others with hard words, ſhould call this *explaining* things.

The ſum of the anſwer is this; that when we have done all we can, God's fore-knowledge of future events may ſeem contradictious and impoſſible to us, much leſs do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it: but we have ſufficient aſſurance of the thing, and unleſs we had infinite underſtandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, That if we can admit ſuch a knowledge in God as ſeems contradictious and impoſſible to our reaſon, why may we not allow and frame ſuch notions of his goodneſs and juſtice?

To this I anſwer, There is a great difference between thoſe perfections of God which are imitable, and thoſe which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like God; and if we are aſſured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould know the manner of it, and diſentangle it from contradiction and impoſſibility: But it is otherwiſe in God's goodneſs and juſtice, which are imitable; he that imitates, endeavours to be like ſomething that he knows, and we muſt have a clear idea and notion of that which we would bring ourſelves to the likeneſs of; theſe perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of theſe perfections is chiefly recommended to us in ſcripture, *Jer.* ix. 24. By theſe God reveals himſelf, and declares his name, and makes himſelf known to us, even by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, *Exod.* xxxiv. 6, 7. *Pſal.* lxxxvi. 15. *Deut.* xxxii. 3, 4, 5. When God would give a deſcription of himſelf to *Moſes*, he promiſes *to cauſe his goodneſs to paſs before him.* So that it doth not follow, that becauſe God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithſtanding the ſeeming contradiction and impoſſibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's juſtice or goodneſs that ſeems contradictious or impoſſible. The

Third Objection is made up of ſeveral inconveniencies that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly foreſees we will do; for otherwiſe his knowledge would be fallible.

Anſw. God's fore-knowledge lays no neceſſity upon the event; in every event, we may conſider the effect *in itſelf*, or with relation to the *cauſe*, and the manner how it comes to paſs; conſidered *in itſelf*, it is *future*, with relation to its *cauſes*, it is *contingent*. God ſees it as *both*, and ſo, as that which until it is, may be, or not be; and when is comes to paſs, he ſees the man do it freely; and ſo before it be done, it hath no neceſſity; but upon ſuppoſition of foreſight; as *when it is*, as *Origen* excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not *the cauſe* of the things that are fore-known; but becauſe the thing is future and ſhall be, this is the reaſon why it is fore-known; for it doth not, becauſe it was known, come to paſs; but becauſe it was to come to paſs, therefore it was fore-known; and bare knowledge is no more the cauſe of any event, which becauſe it is known muſt infallibly be, than my ſeeing a man run, is the cauſe of his running, which, becauſe I do ſee is infallibly ſo.

2. If God infallibly fore-knows what Men will do, how can he be ſerious in his exhortations to repentance, in his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men?

Anſwer. All theſe are founded in the liberty of our actions. God exhorts to repentance, and expects it, becauſe, by his grace we may do it: He is ſaid to grieve for our impenitency, becauſe we may do otherwiſe, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themſelves, but very proper to their end; though, through our obſtinacy and hardneſs, they may be rendered vain to us, and without effect. If the weight of the objection lie upon *ſerious*, and you aſk how God can exhort men *ſeriouſly* to that which he fore-ſees that they will not do; thoſe whom he fore-knows will be finally impenitent? I anſwer, If his exhortations were not *ſerious*, he could not fore-ſee the final impenitency of men. To fore-ſee mens final impenitency, is to fore-ſee their wilful contempt of God's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace: Now mens wilful contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be foreſeen, unleſs God fore-ſee that his exhortations are *ſerious*, and in good earneſt.

Having anſwered the objections againſt God's fore-knowing future events, I proceed to ſhew,

II. That God only knows future events, *Iſa*. xliv. 6, 7. *Thus ſaith the Lord the king of Iſrael, and his redeemer the Lord of hoſts, I am the firſt, and I am the laſt, and beſides me there is no God: And who, as I, ſhall call, and ſhall declare it, and ſet it in order for me, ſince I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and ſhall come? let them ſhew unto them.* Iſa. xlvi. 9, 10. *Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none elſe, I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, ſaying, My counſel ſhall ſtand, and I will do all my pleaſure.*

The reaſon is evident, becauſe the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite underſtanding; eſpecially if we grant it to be beyond our finite underſtanding, to explain the poſſibility of ſuch a knowledge; for, to be ſure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot ſo much as underſtand how it is poſſible it ſhould be known by any underſtanding.

But it may here be objected; Did not the oracles among the heathens fore-tell ſeveral things, which chriſtians are ſatisfied came from the devil? I have not time at preſent to examine the buſineſs of heathen oracles; I could eaſily ſhew there was much impoſture in them: but grant they were really delivered and given out by a ſpirit; yet the darkneſs and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is ſuch, as ſhews that the devil was conſcious to himſelf of the uncertainty of his knowledge in thoſe matters: and thoſe few that came to paſs, and are in any tolerable ſenſe ſaid to be accompliſhed, were in ſuch matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far, (and I grant the devil to be a ſagacious ſpirit); or elſe in disjunctive caſes, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it muſt either be ſo, or ſo, in which a bold gueſſing may often hit right: but *gueſſing* at future things, is far from *a knowledge* of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumſtances of time and perſon, ſuch as we find in ſcripture in many inſtances, to the prediction of which, the greateſt ſagacity, and the utmoſt gueſſing could do nothing, ſuch as thoſe predictions of which I gave inſtances out of ſcripture.

I have now done with the *firſt* general head I propoſed to be ſpoken to from theſe words, *viz.* To prove that this attribute of *knowledge* belongs to God. I proceed to the

Second, viz. To conſider the perfection and prerogative of the divine knowledge; which I ſhall ſpeak to in theſe following particulars:

1. God's knowledge is *preſent* and *actual*, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more *power* than *act*: it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know: it is but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we muſt take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and ſteady comprehenſion of things; he being every-where preſent, and all eye, nothing can eſcape his ſight, but all objects are at once in

the view of the divine underſtanding. *Heb.* iv. 13. *Neither is there any creature that is not manifeſt in his ſight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

2. God's knowledge is an *intimate* and *thorough* knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and eſſence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and ſuperficial; our knowledge glides upon the ſuperficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it ſeldom reacheth further than the ſkin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are repreſented to us with all their maſks and diſguiſes: but God knows things as they are, 1 *Sam.* xvi. 7. *The Lord ſeeth not as man ſeeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart:* God knows things throughout all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of God penetrates into every thing; the light of the divine underſtanding lays all things *open and naked*, Heb. iv. 13. In which expreſſion the apoſtle alludes to the ſacrifices of beaſts, which were flead, and cleft down the back-bone, that the prieſt might look into them, and ſee whether they were without blemiſh. To the eye of our underſtandings moſt objects are cloſe, and have their ſkins upon them; but to the eyes of God all things are uncovered and diſſected, and lie open to his view.

3. God's knowledge is *clear* and *diſtinct.* Our underſtandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confuſion; we are often deceived with the near likeneſs and reſemblance of things, and miſtake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not ſufficiently ſeparate and diſtinguiſh things from one another; we ſee things many times together, and in an heap, and do but know them in groſs: but there is no confuſion in the divine underſtanding, *that* is a clear light which ſeparates and diſtinguiſheth things of the greateſt nearneſs and reſemblance: God hath a particular knowledge of the leaſt things: *Luke* xii. 7. *Even the very hairs of your head are all number'd*; thoſe things which are of the leaſt conſideration, and have the greateſt likeneſs to one another; *the very hairs of your head* are ſeverally and diſtinctly known to God.

4. God's knowledge is *certain* and *infallible.* We are ſubject to doubt and error in our underſtanding of things; every thing almoſt impoſeth upon our underſtandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwiſe than they are; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our intereſt and advantage, our humours and diſtempers; theſe all miſrepreſent things, and darken our minds, and ſeduce our judgments, and betray us to error and miſtake: but the divine underſtanding is a clear, fixed, conſtant, and undiſturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no ſtain from affection, or intereſt, or any other thing. Men are many times confident, and apt to impoſe upon others, as if they were infallible: but this is the prerogative of God, the privilege of the divine underſtanding, that it is ſecure from all poſſibility of error: it is *God* only *that cannot lie*, Tit. i. 2. becauſe he cannot be deceived: The *infallibility* of God is the foundation of his *veracity*.

5. The knowledge of God is *eaſy*, and *without difficulty*. We muſt dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not attain the knowledge of things without ſearch and ſtudy, and great intention of mind; we ſtrive to comprehend ſome things, but they are ſo vaſt that we cannot: other things are at ſuch a diſtance, that our underſtanding is too weak to diſcern them; other things are ſo little, and ſmall, and nice, that our underſtanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our minds to ſuch a point as to faſten upon them; but the underſtanding of God being infinite, there is nothing at a diſtance from it, nothing too great and vaſt for its comprehenſion; nor is there any thing ſo little, that it can eſcape his knowledge and animadverſion. The great wiſdom of *Solomon* is compared to *the ſand on the ſea-ſhore*; the ſhore is vaſt, but the ſands are little (ſaith one), to ſignify that the vaſt mind of *Solomon* did comprehend the leaſt things. It is much more true of God; his underſtanding is a vaſt comprehenſion of the leaſt things, as well as the greateſt; and all this God does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without ſtudy, and his underſtanding is in continual exerciſe without wearineſs. How many things are there which we cannot find out without ſearch, without looking narrowly into, and bending our minds to underſtand them? But all things are obvious to God, and lie open to his view.

He is ſaid, indeed, in ſcripture, *to ſearch the heart*, and *to try the reins*, and *to weigh the ſpirits*: but theſe expreſſions do not ſignify the *painfulneſs*, but the *perfection* of his knowledge; that he knows thoſe things as perfectly, as we can do any thing about which we uſe the greateſt diligence and exactneſs.

6. The knowledge of God is *univerſal*, and extends to *all objects*. We know but a few things, our ignorance is greater than our knowledge; *Maxima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus*: but the divine underſtanding is vaſt and comprehenſive, and by an imperious view commands all objects; *he is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things*; he knows himſelf, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the ſecrets of his will, 1 *Cor.* ii. 11. *The ſpirit of God ſearcheth the deep things of God*; he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of God is infinite; *Pſal.* cxlvii. 5. *His underſtanding is infinite*: he knows himſelf, and his own perfections, and all the poſſibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the underſtanding of God being infinite, is incapable of any addition, or diminution, or change. Our finite underſtandings are liable to alterations; they may grow, or decline: but the knowledge of God is a full, conſtant light, it is always the ſame, not liable to any eclipſe, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the ſame.

Thirdly, I come now to draw ſome inferences from the ſeveral parts of this diſcourſe.

I. From the perfection of God's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the divineknowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiſeth our admiration, and none more than *knowledge*: There is nothing that we value ourſelves or others more by, than this: The higheſt knowledge of man, the moſt glorious underſtanding, that ever any one of the ſons of men were endowed with, is, compared to the knowledge of God, but as a glow-worm to the ſun. If we admire theſe *candles of the Lord*, which ſhine ſo imperfectly in the dark; if we reverence a little knowledge, compaſſed about with ignorance; how ſhould we admire *the Father of lights, in whom is no darkneſs at all*, that knowledge which hath nothing of blemiſh or imperfection in it!

2. We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account, as we have all our knowledge from him: *What have we that we have not received?* And as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the divine underſtanding. We are blind and ignorant; it is but a few things that we are capable of knowing; and we know but a few of thoſe things which our natures are capable of knowing; and of thoſe things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect, it is ſlight and ſuperficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confuſion in the uſe of it; the cleareſt reaſon, and the brighteſt underſtanding of man, hath many flaws and defects in it: ſo that the more we know of God and of ourſelves, the more humble we ſhall be. It is *an empty knowledge, and falſely ſo called*, that *puffs up*; as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raiſe up themſelves; but thoſe which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads: ſo it is only ignorance that is proud, and lifts men up, but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement: He knows our wants and weakneſs, *and will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear*; *for he conſiders that we are but duſt*; he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can, when he pleaſes, *put a hook in their noſe*, and *his bridle in their lips* as he did to *Senacherib*, 2 Kings xix. 28.

II. From God's knowing our ſecret actions, I infer,

1. If God ſees our moſt ſecret actions, this diſcovers and confutes the ſecret atheiſm of many. He that commits the moſt ſecret ſin, denies the omniſcience of God. Thus *David* deſcribes the atheiſm of ſome in his days: *He hath ſaid in his heart, God hath forgot*; *he hideth his face, he will never ſee it*: *The Lord ſhall not ſee, neither ſhall the God of Jacob regard it*. And is not this, in effect, to deny God's being? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A man may as well deny there is a ſun, as deny that it ſhines and enlightens the world.

There are ſome relicks of this even in the beſt men, which do at ſome times diſcover themſelves: *Pſal.* lxxiii. 10, 11. *Therefore his people return hither*; *and waters*

ters of a full cup are wrung out to them: And they ſay, How doth God know? is there knowledge in the moſt High? that is, The people of God come to this, when they are come to an afflicted ſtate, and ſee the proſperity of wicked men; they come to this, to queſtion the providence of God, whether he takes knowledge of the affairs of the world. But this atheiſm reigns in wicked men; while they live in their ſins, they live in the denial of God's omniſcience: for did men really believe that *God ſees in ſecret*, that his eye perceiveth the darkneſs, and lays *open* and *naked* all things before it, how durſt they lie, and ſteal, and ſwear falſely? Vain man! why doſt thou ſeek darkneſs and retirement? How art thou alone, if thou believeſt that God is every-where? How can'ſt thou retire from him? How can'ſt thou ſhut him out? If thou believeſt that *he is light*, what ſecurity is darkneſs to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greateſt and beſt perſon in the world, who is thy ſovereign, thy judge, thy father, and thy maſter, and thy beſt friend, (for we uſe to reverence perſons under theſe notions and relations, and to be aſhamed to do any thing that is vile and unſeemly before them); if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not aſhamed? why does not thy blood riſe in thy face? Why ſhould not ſhame and fear work upon the apprehenſion of God's ſeeing us, as if men did behold us? For this, that God ſees thee, is a greater ſurprize and diſcovery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world ſtood by thee.

2. Live as thoſe that believe this; be continually under the power of this apprehenſion, that God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this, would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a reſtraint upon us as to ſin; *Sic vivamus tanquam in conſpectu vivamus.* Sen. It were well if men would live as if any body ſaw them; but to live as if ſome worthy and excellent perſon were always preſent with us, and did obſerve us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are ſome ſins of that uglineſs and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the preſence of any one, of a child, or a fool; and there are ſome perſons of ſuch worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditi quoque homines vitia ſupprimerent. Epicurus* had this good conceit of himſelf, that he could adviſe others ſo to act as if he ſtood by, *Fac omnia tanquam ſpectet* Epicurus: But *Seneca* inſtanceth much better in *Cato*, or *Scipio*, or *Lælius*;

Ut ſic tanquam illo ſpectante vivamus.

and ſhall not the preſence of the divine Majeſty be an eternal reſtraint upon us?

This was *David*'s courſe to keep himſelf from ſin, *Pſal.* xxxix. 1. *I will take heed to my way while the wicked is before me*; how much more in the preſence of God? *I have kept thy precepts and thy teſtimonies, for all my ways are before thee*, Pſal. cxix. 168. And it was wiſely adviſed by *Seneca*, *That we ſhould ſo live when we are among men, as believing God ſees us*; and *when there is none but he ſees us, let us behave ourſelves before him, as if men did ſtare upon us.*

III. God's *knowledge* of the heart, teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocriſy: How vain it is to make a ſhew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our hearts we are not; to put on a maſk of religion, and paint ourſelves beautifully without, when *inwardly we are full of rottenneſs and uncleanneſs*; to *honour God with our lips, when our hearts are far from him?* If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wiſe way, for there is danger of diſcovery even from them; therefore the beſt way for a man to ſeem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear: but having to deal with God, who *knows our thoughts afar off*, to whom all our diſguiſes are tranſparent, and all our little arts of concealment ſignify nothing, it is a madneſs to hide our iniquity in our boſom. With this argument our Saviour convinceth the hypocritical Phariſees, *Luke* xvi. 15. *Ye are they that juſtify yourſelves before men; but God knoweth your hearts.*

2. If God know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge yourſelves with inward purity and holineſs, becauſe of the pure eyes which behold the moſt intimate and ſecret motions of your ſouls; therefore *cleanſe your hearts from wickedneſs: how long ſhall vain thoughts lodge within you?* Fear

and ſhame from men lay a great reſtraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a ſtrange freedom do we take within our own breaſts? This is an argument of the ſecret atheiſm that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himſelf in any wicked thoughts and imaginations, which (out of regard to men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares that he reverenceth men more than God; that he either diſbelieves a God, or deſpiſeth him.

Therefore *keep your hearts with all diligence*, becauſe they are peculiarly under God's inſpection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts becauſe no eye ſees you, aſk yourſelves, *Doth not he that pondereth the heart conſider it? And he that keepeth thy ſoul, doth he not know it?* as the wiſe man ſpeaks, *Prov.* xxiv. 12.

And whatever you do in the ſervice of God, *do it heartily as to the Lord.* Indeed, if we did only worſhip God, *to be ſeen of men*, an external worſhip would be ſufficient: but religion is not intended to pleaſe men, but God; he is a ſpirit, and ſees our ſpirits, therefore we muſt *worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth*, 1 Theſſ. ii. 4. *Not as pleaſing men, but God, who trieth our hearts. David* uſeth this argument to his ſon *Solomon*, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. *And thou, Solomon, my ſon, know thou the God of thy father, and ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* Whatever liberty we may take to ourſelves now, and how careleſs ſoever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the ſcripture aſſures us, that he who now ſees our hearts, will one day judge us according to them, *Jer.* xvii. 10. *I the Lord ſearch the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways.* And the apoſtle ſpeaks of *a day coming wherein God will judge the ſecrets of men by Jeſus Chriſt*, Hebr. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.

3. This is matter of encouragement to us in many caſes: In our ſecret troubles, *Pſal.* cxlii. 3. *When my ſpirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou kneweſt my path.* In caſes of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men; which though we do not know, yet God knows them: ſo the apoſtles, *Acts* i. 24. when they did not know whom to chuſe for an apoſtle, they refer it to God; and *they prayed and ſaid, Thou, Lord, which knoweſt the hearts of all, ſhew whether of theſe two thou haſt choſen.* But eſpecially this is matter of comfort to us, when we ſuffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hyprocriſy, and falſeneſs, and inſincerity; then to be able to appeal to *the ſearcher of hearts*, as to our innocency and ſincerity, and to ſay with the prophet *Jeremiah, O Lord of hoſts, that tryeſt the righteous, and ſeeſt the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my cauſe*, chap. xx. 12. and with St. *Peter, God which knoweth the hearts, bare them witneſs*, Acts. xv. 8.

4. This renders all the deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing: *The Lord knows the thoughts of men, that they are vanity*; Pſal. xciv. 11. becauſe he knows them, and can defeat them; he can *bring their counſels to nought, and make their devices of none effect.* He is conſcious to the firſt motions of their hearts; he ſees thoſe cobwebs which they are ſpinning, and can blow them away with a breath; he can ſnare them in their own policies, and *turn their counſels into fooliſhneſs.* Thou that putteſt a maſk upon a wicked deſign, and hideſt the malice and revenge of thine heart under a diſſembling countenance, God ſees thy deſign, and hath a thouſand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their deſign ſure with all imaginable caution, and that their counſels cannot miſcarry, being out of all poſſibility of human diſcovery or prevention; for all this, *their counſels may come to nought*, and though *they have reſolved it*, yet it may *not ſtand*; *he that ſits in the heavens laughs at them, the Lord hath them in deriſion.* As wiſe as they are, they are guilty of this over-ſight, that they did not take God into conſideration, by whom they are ſurprized and diſcovered. He that ſees their deſign, can blaſt it in a moment; he *can ſpeak the word*, and *thy breath ſhall go forth, and thou ſhalt return to thy duſt, and in that very day thy thoughts periſh*, Pſal. cxlvi. 4.

5. If God only knows the hearts of men, then *what art thou, O man, that judgeſt another's heart?* This condemns the uncharitableneſs of men, who take upon them to judge and cenſure men's hearts; which is, *to ſpeak evil of the things which they know not*; to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. *James* ſaith, *chap.* iv. 12. *There is one law-giver, that is able to ſave, and to de-*

ſtroy; who art thou that judgeſt another? is proportionably true in this caſe; there is but *one that knows the heart*; *who art thou then that judgeſt another man's heart?* Who art thou, O man! that takeſt upon thee to ſit in judgment upon thy brother, and to paſs ſentence upon his heart, to pronounce him an hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch? Art thou *a man*, and *the ſon of man*, and wilt thou aſſume to thyſelf the prerogative of *God?* Man can only look to the *outward appearance*; but *God ſeeth the heart.*

There is nothing doth more palpably diſcover the unchriſtian ſpirit of that new ſect which is of late riſen up amongſt us, than their taking upon them to judge men's hearts, and as confidently to cenſure every man they meet, as if they had a window into his breaſt: But they are not alone guilty of this; thoſe who are ſo ready to call men hypocrites, they invade this prerogative of God. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule; or a man wicked, as to his preſent ſtate, if the general courſe of his life and actions be wicked; for our Saviour tells us, *by their fruits ye ſhall know them.* This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be ſure it is ſo: but to call any man an hypocrite, who makes an outward profeſſion of religion, and whoſe external converſation is unblameable; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou can'ſt have no evidence, this is *to aſcend into heaven*, and ſtep into *the throne of God, and to be like the moſt High*; for *he, even he only, knows the hearts of the children of men.*

IV. From God's knowledge of future events, we may learn.

1. The vanity of aſtrology, and all other arts that pretend to fore-tell future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of theſe arts hath been ſufficiently ſhewn by learned men, from the weakneſs and uncertainty of the principles they rely upon: I ſhall only for the preſent take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, that *God only knows future events.* From prudent collections and obſervations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in ſome caſes; but there are no certain proſpective-glaſſes, with which we can ſee future events, but divine revelation; therefore whoever takes upon him to fore-tell future events without divine revelation, he arrogates to himſelf that which is the prerogative of the Deity; and God delights to chaſtiſe the curioſity, and croſs the predictions of theſe vain pretenders: *Iſai.* xliv. 24, 25. *Thus ſaith the Lord that formed thee; I am the Lord that maketh all things, that ſtretcheth forth the heavens alone, that ſpreadeth abroad the earth by myſelf; that fruſtrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wiſe men backward, and maketh their knowledge fooliſh.* As he alſo in ſcripture threatens thoſe who conſult them, and rely upon them: Thoſe who go to aſtrologers, or wiſe men, as they call them, to know their fortunes, and enquire of the events of their life, they *forſake God*, and *betake themſelves to lying vanities.*

2. Refer future things to God, who only knows them; truſt him with all events; *caſt your care upon him.* When you have uſed your beſt prudence, and wiſdom, and diligence for your ſupply and ſecurity for the future, leave the reſt to God, *for your heavenly father knoweth* both your wants and your dangers. When we are overſollicitous about future things, we take God's proper work out of his hands, and uſurp the government of the world. Why do we *take too much upon us? We are but of yeſterday*, and *know not what will be to-morrow.*

Mind your preſent duty and work, and leave events to God: *Secret things belong to the Lord our God; but thoſe things that are revealed to us, and our children for ever, to do all the words of this law,* Deut xxix. 29. Do your duty, *commit the reſt to God in well doing.*

In this world we are in a mix'd condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happineſs and miſery: What is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our duty; but in great wiſdom and pity to mankind, God hath concealed and hid the reſt from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen to us; becauſe the beſt things of this world are but ſhallow and empty, and if we could ſee them beforehand, we ſhould prevent ourſelves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the ſweetneſs which is in them by delighſful fore-thoughts of them: And he hath concealed future evils from us, leſt we ſhould torment ourſelves with the fearful expectation of them.

Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginoſâ nocte premit Deus.
Ridetque, ſi mortalis ultra fas trepidat.

What a folly is it to make yourſelves miſerable with fear of being ſo; *ante miſerias miſer.* Uſe all wiſe means to prevent what you fear, and then be ſatisfied, and be as happy as you can 'till miſery come; go not forth to meet it, *ſufficient for the day is the evil thereof*; do not anticipate the evils of to-morrow, and take preſent poſſeſſion of an evil to come; *Caſt your care upon him* who hath promiſed *to care for you.*

SERMON LXXXII.

The Wiſdom, Glory, and Sovereignty of GOD.

JUDE, *ver.* 25.

To the only wiſe God our Saviour, be glory and majeſty, dominion and power, now and ever.

I AM treating of the attributes of God, particularly of thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, his *knowledge* and *wiſdom.* The *knowledge* of God, only implies his bare underſtanding of things; but his *wiſdom*, implies the ſkill of ordering and diſpoſing things to the beſt ends and purpoſes, the ſkill of making and governing, and adminiſtring all things in number, weight, and meaſure. The *knowledge* of God rather conſiders things abſolutely, and in themſelves: The *wiſdom* of God, conſiders rather the reſpects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notion of means, and ends; accordingly I deſcribe them thus: The *knowledge* of God, is a perfect comprehenſion of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumſtances. The *wiſdom* of God, is a perfect comprehenſion of the reſpects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and oppoſition, their fitneſs and unfitneſs to ſuch and ſuch ends. I have largely ſpoken to the *Firſt* of theſe: I come now to the

Second, The *wiſdom* of God in general; together with his *majeſty* and *ſovereignty*, as they are here joined together. I begin with the

Firſt, That *God is the only wiſe God.* In handling of this, I ſhall ſhew,

1. In what ſenſe God may be ſaid to be the *only wiſe God.*
2. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

1. In what ſenſe God may be ſaid to be *the only wiſe God.* For anſwer to this, we may take notice, that there are ſome perfections of God that are *incommunicable* to the creatures; as, his *independency* and *eternity:* Theſe God only poſſeſſeth, and they are to be attributed to him alone; God only is *independent* and *eternal:* But there are other perfections which are *communicable*, that is, which the creatures may, in ſome meaſure and degree, partake of, as *knowledge*, and *wiſdom*, and *goodneſs*, and *juſtice*, and *power*, and the like; yet theſe the ſcriptures do peculiarly attribute to God; not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in ſuch a peculiar and divine manner, as doth ſhut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that degree and perfection wherein God poſſeſſeth them. I ſhall give you ſome inſtances of this. His *goodneſs*, this is reſerved to God alone, *Matth.* xix. 17. *Why calleſt thou me good? there is none good, but one, that is God:* His *power* and *immortality*, 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. *Who is the bleſſed and only potentate; who only hath immortality:* His *wiſdom*, 1 Tim. i. 17. *The only wiſe God:* Rom. xvi. 27. *To God only wiſe be glory:* His *Holineſs*, Rev. xv. 14. *For thou only art holy.* The tranſcendent degree and ſingularity of theſe divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to con-

ceive: ſo that although the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfection wherein God poſſeſſeth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity: ſo that, in this ſenſe, *there is none good but God*; he only is *holy*, he is *the only wiſe*: in ſo inconceivable a manner doth God poſſeſs even thoſe perfections, which in ſome degree he communicates; and we can only underſtand them as he communicates them, and not as he poſſeſſeth them; ſo that when we conſider any of theſe divine perfections, we muſt not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature: but we muſt ſay, that the *goodneſs* and *wiſdom* of God are all this which is in the creature, and mnch more, which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premiſed in general, God may be ſaid to be *only wiſe* in theſe *two* reſpects:

I. As being *originally* and *independently wiſe*.

II. As being *eminently* and *tranſcendently* ſo.

1. God only is *originally* and *independently* wiſe. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him: *Rom.* xi. 33, 34. *O the depth of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways paſt finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counſellor? Or who hath firſt given to him, and it ſhall be recompenſed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.* He challengeth any creature to come forth and ſay, that they have given wiſdom, or any other perfection, to God. No, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him: *Prov.* ii. 6. *For the Lord giveth wiſdom.* Eccleſ. ii. 26. *God giveth to a man that is good in his ſight, wiſdom, and knowledge, and joy.* Dan. ii. 21. *He giveth wiſdom to the wiſe, and knowledge to them that know underſtanding.*

2. He is *eminently* and *tranſcendently* ſo: And this follows from the former, becauſe God is the fountain of wiſdom, therefore it is moſt eminently in him: *Pſal.* xciv. 9, 10. *He that planted the ear, ſhall he not hear? he that formed the eye, ſhall he not ſee? he that teacheth man knowledge, ſhall not he know?* In like manner, we may reaſon concerning all other attributes of God, that if he communicates them, he is much more eminently poſſeſſed of them himſelf; the greateſt wiſdom of the creatures is nothing in oppoſition to the wiſdom of God, nothing in compariſon to it.

Nothing in oppoſition to it: *Job.* v. 13. *He taketh the wiſe in their own craftineſs.* Job. ix. 4. *He is wiſe in heart, and mighty in ſtrength: Who hath hardened himſelf againſt him, and proſpered?* Prov. xxi. 30. *There is no wiſdom, nor underſtanding, nor counſel againſt the Lord.* 1 Cor. i. 19. *He will deſtroy the wiſdom of the wiſe*; ver. 27. *and by fooliſh things counfound the wiſe.*

Nothing in compariſon of it. There are a great many that pretend to wiſdom, but moſt are deſtitute of true wiſdom; and thoſe who have it, have it with many imperfections and diſadvantages. Uſually thoſe who are deſtitute of true wiſdom, pretend moſt to it: *Job.* xi. 12. *Vain man would be wiſe, though he be born like a wild aſs's colt.* The high and the great of this world pretend to it: *Job.* xxxii. 9. *Great men are not always wiſe.* Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen philoſophers were great profeſſors of wiſdom: *Rom.* i. 22. *Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools:* They were *wiſe to do evil, but to do good they had no underſtanding*, as the prophet ſpeaks, *Jer.* iv. 22. The politicians of the world, they pretend to it; but theirs is rather a *craftineſs* than *a wiſdom*. Men call it *prudence*; but they are glad to uſe many arts to ſet it off, and make it look like wiſdom; by ſilence, and ſecrecy, and formality, and affected gravity, and nods, and geſtures. The ſcripture calls it *the wiſdom of this world*, 1 *Cor.* ii. 6. and a *fleſhly wiſdom*, 2 Cor. i. 12. It is wiſdom miſapplied; it is the purſuit of a wrong end. The petty plots and deſigns of this world are far from wiſdom: 1 *Cor.* iii. 20. *The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wiſe, that they are vain.* That cannot be wiſdom, which miſtakes its great end, which minds mean things, and neglects thoſe which are of greateſt concernment to them: *Job.* xxii. 2. *He that is wiſe, is profitable to himſelf.* Prov. ix. 12. *If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thyſelf.* *Tully* tells us *Ennius* was wont tc ſay, *Ne quicquam ſapere ſapientem, qui ſibi ipſi prodeſſe non quiret.* The wiſe *ſages* of the world, as to the beſt things are fools, *Mat.* xi. 25. *God hath hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent.* There are many that are *wiſe* *in their own conceits; but there is more hope of a fool than of them*, Prov. xxvi. 12. So that the greateſt part of that which paſſeth for wiſdom among men, is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quam nihil ſapere*; we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir ſapiens*, Tul. Thoſe few in the world that are *the children of true wiſdom*, they have it in a very imperfect degree; they are not uſually ſo wiſe for their ſouls, and for eternity, as men of this world. *Luke* xvi. 8. *The children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light*. It is attended with many inconveniences. *Eccl.* i. 18. *In much wiſdom there is much grief*: he ſpeaks of the wiſdom about natural things.

But we need not inſtance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wiſdom which are to be found in good men, in *wiſdom's* own *children*; the wiſdom of God needs not theſe foils to ſet it off: the wiſdom of man in innocency, or of the higheſt angel in heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wiſdom of God. We mortal men, many times miſtake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accompliſhing good ends; the angels in glory have not a perfect comprehenſion of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitneſs and oppoſition of them one to another: but the divine wiſdom propounds to itſelf the higheſt and beſt ends, and hath a perfect comprehenſion of the fitneſs and unfitneſs of all things one to another; ſo that angels are but fooliſh beings to God. *Job* iv. 18. *His angels he chargeth with folly*. *Job*, upon a full enquiry after wiſdom, concludes that it only belongs to God, that he is only perfectly poſſeſſed of it. *Job*. xxviii. 12, *&c. But where ſhall wiſdom be found, and where is the place of underſtanding?* In ſuch an eminent and tranſcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; God only hath it, *ver*. 23. *God knoweth the place thereof*.

II. I ſhall prove that this perfection belongs to God.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon; and,
2. From ſcripture.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon. I have often told you the perfections of God are not to be proved by way of *demonſtration*, becauſe there is no cauſe of them; but by way of *conviction*, by ſhewing the abſurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections; therefore wiſdom belongs to God. Among men folly is looked upon as the greateſt defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and diſgrace than vice and wickedneſs; it is of ſo ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true eſteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedneſs, the greateſt imperfection; and, on the contrary, wiſdom is the higheſt perfection next to holineſs and goodneſs; it is uſually more cried up in the world than any thing elſe. Reaſon tells us, though the ſcripture had not ſaid it; that *wiſdom excels folly as much as light doth darkneſs*, Eccl. ii. 13. *The wiſdom of a man maketh his face to ſhine*, Eccl. viii. 1. *Wiſdom is a defence*,—vii. 12. and *ver*, 19. *Wiſdom ſtrengthneth the wiſe more than ten mighty men that are in the city*.

And the denial of this perfection to God, would argue many other imperfections; it would be an univerſal blemiſh to the divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of God. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wiſdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power ſhould act without the conduct and direction of infinite wiſdom! it would eclipſe the providence of God, and put out the *eyes* that are in the *wheels*, as the prophet repreſents God's providence. There can be no counſel, no forecaſt, no orderly government of the world without wiſdom. The goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, and truth of God, could not ſhine with that luſtre, were it not for his wiſdom, which doth illuſtrate theſe with ſo much advantage.

I need not bring teſtimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expreſſions of their admiration of God's wiſe government of the world. I will not trouble you with quotations of particular teſtimonies. *Epicurus* indeed denied that God either made or governed the world; but he muſt needs acknowledge him to have been a very wiſe being, becauſe he made him happy, which cannot be without wiſdom, though he had taken away all other evidence of his wiſdom. *Ariſtotle* ſeems to have ſuppoſed the world to be a neceſſary reſult and emanation from God: but then the other ſects of philoſophers did ſuppoſe the world to be the free product of God's goodneſs and wiſdom.

2. From ſcripture; *Job* ix. 4. *He is wiſe in heart*;—xxxvi. 5. *He is mighty in ſtrength and wiſdom.* Dan. ii. 20. *Bleſſed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wiſdom and might are his.* Hither we may refer thoſe texts, which attribute wiſdom to God in a ſingular and peculiar manner, *Rom.* xvi. 27. and thoſe which ſpeak of God as the fountain of it, who communicates and beſtows it upon his creatures, *Dan.* ii. 21. *James* i. 5. and thoſe texts which ſpeak of the wiſdom of God in the creation of the world, *Pſal.* civ. 24. *O Lord, how wonderful are thy works, in wiſdom haſt thou made them all!* Jer. x. 12. *Who hath eſtabliſhed the world by his wiſdom, and ſtretched forth the heavens by his diſcretion*; in the providence and government of the world. *Dan.* ii. 20. *Wiſdom and ſtrength are his, and he changeth times and ſeaſons; he removeth kings, and ſetteth up kings:* and in many other places, in the redemption of mankind. Therefore Chriſt is called *the wiſdom of God*, 1 Cor. i. 24. and the diſpenſation of the goſpel, *the hidden wiſdom of God, and the manifold wiſdom of God*, Eph. iii. 10.

If then God be *only wiſe*, the *original* and only fountain of it, from thence we learn.

Firſt, To go to him for it, *Jam.* i. 5. *If any man lack wiſdom, let him aſk it of God.* There are many conceited men that think they are rich and increaſed, and ſtand in need of nothing. The Apoſtle doth not ſpeak, as if there were ſome that did not want wiſdom, but becauſe there are ſome ſo proud and conceited, that they think they lack nothing; thoſe are ſtark fools, and God *reſiſts* ſuch fooliſh and proud men: But if any man, ſenſible of his defect and imperfection, cometh to God; *he gives liberally, and upbraids no man.* We are aſhamed to learn wiſdom of men, leſt they ſhould contemn and upbraid us with our folly: Men are envious and unwilling that others ſhould be as wiſe as themſelves; but God's goodneſs makes him willing to impart wiſdom; *he gives liberally, and upbraids no man.*

This is the moſt deſirable accompliſhment and perfection; *Happy is the man that getteth wiſdom; wiſdom is the principal thing, therefore get wiſdom:* It is better than thoſe things that are of the higheſt value among men, as *Solomon* often makes the compariſon. Now becauſe *it comes down from above*, we ſhould *look up* for it; it is by the revelation of his will, and the wiſe counſels of his word, that we are made *wiſe unto ſalvation*; therefore we ſhould beg of him, that *he would give us the ſpirit of wiſdom and revelation in the knowledge of himſelf*, Eph. i. 17.

2. If God be *only wiſe* in ſuch an eminent and tranſcendent degree, then let us be humble. There is no cauſe of *boaſting*, ſeeing *we have nothing but what we have received.* The loweſt inſtance, the leaſt ſpecimen of divine wiſdom out-ſhines the higheſt pitch of human wiſdom; *the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men*, 1 Cor. i. 25. therefore *let not the wiſe man glory in his wiſdom*, Jer. ix. 23. Of all things we ſhould not be proud of wiſdom; the proud man throws down the reputation of his wiſdom, by the way that he would raiſe it. No ſuch evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wiſe; *ſapientis animus nunquam turgeſcit, nunquam tumet*, Cic. To pride ourſelves in our own wiſdom, is the way to have our folly made manifeſt. God threatens *to deſtroy the wiſdom of the wiſe men*, and *to turn their wiſdom into fooliſhneſs.*

3. We ſhould labour to partake of the wiſdom of God, ſo far as it is communicable. The greateſt wiſdom that we are capable of, is to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; *to be wiſe to that which is good*, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, *Rom.* xvi. 19. that is, to provide for the future in time, to make proviſion for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear God and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive inſtruction, and to win ſouls; theſe are the characters which the ſcripture gives of wiſdom. When *Job* had declared, that the excellency of the divine wiſdom was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that wiſdom is, which is proper for us: *And unto man he ſaid, The fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom; and to depart from evil, that is underſtanding.* There are many that are wiſe to worldly ends and purpoſes, as our Saviour tells us; wiſe to get riches, and to aſcend to honours: But this is not the wiſdom which we are to labour after; this is but a ſhort-witted prudence, to ſerve a preſent turn, without any proſpect to the future, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wiſe for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If God be only wiſe, then put your truſt and confidence in him. Whom ſhould we truſt rather than infinite wiſdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodneſs and power? In all caſes of difficulty truſt him for direction; *acknowledge him in all thy ways*, that he may *direct thy ſteps*; *commit thy way unto the Lord, and lean not to thine own underſtanding. The race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong*, but the providence of God diſpoſeth all theſe things. And if we rely upon our own wiſdom, that will prove a *broken reed*. And as our wiſdom is a broken reed, ſo the wiſdom of other men. *Iſa.* xxxi. 1, 2. God curſeth them that *go down into Egypt, and truſt to their ſtrength and wiſdom, but look not to the holy one of Iſrael, neither ſeek the Lord*; *yet he alſo is wiſe*, ſaith the prophet.

5. Let us adore the wiſdom of God, and ſay with St. *Paul*, 1 Tim. i. 17. *To the only wiſe God, be honour and glory for ever and ever*, Amen: and with *Daniel*, *Bleſſed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wiſdom and might are his.* Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wiſdom in men; but the divine wiſdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and bleſſing, and praiſe. *Thankſgiving* reſpects the benefits we receive: but we *bleſs* God when we acknowledge any excellency: for as God's *bleſſing* us, is to do us good; ſo our *bleſſing* him, is to ſpeak good of him: As all God's perfections are the objects of our *bleſſing*, ſo more eſpecially his wiſdom is of our *praiſe*; for to praiſe God is to take notice of the wiſe deſign and contrivance of his goodneſs and mercy towards us.

Before I paſs on to the other particulars contained in theſe words, I cannot but take notice, that this *wiſe God* here ſpoken of, is ſtiled *our Saviour*, which ſome underſtand of our *Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity: and if that were ſo, it were all one to my purpoſe, which is in the next place to ſhew, that glory, and *majeſty*, and *dominion*, and *power*, belong to the divine being. But although I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of Chriſt, yet ſeeing there are ſo many plain texts in ſcripture for the proof of it, we have the leſs reaſon to ſtretch doubtful places; and that this is ſo, will appear to any one who conſiders that the title of *Saviour* is ſeveral times in ſcripture attributed to God the father; beſides that in a very antient and authentic copy we find the words read ſomewhat otherwiſe, and ſo as to put this out of all controverſy, μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμων διὰ Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα, &c.

Having premiſed thus much for the clearing of theſe words, I ſhall briefly conſider, *firſt*, God's *glory* and *majeſty*, and then his *dominion* and *ſovereignty*.

Firſt, God's *glory* and *majeſty*. By *majeſty*, we may underſtand the greatneſs, or eminent excellency of the divine nature, which reſults from his perfections, and whereby the divine nature is ſet and placed infinitely above all other beings; I ſay, the eminent excellency of the divine nature, which reſults from his perfections, more eſpecially from thoſe great perfections, his goodneſs, and wiſdom, and power, and holineſs.

And his *glory* is a manifeſtation of this excellency, and a juſt acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in ſcripture, God is ſaid to be *glorious in power*, and *glorious in holineſs*, and his goodneſs is called *his glory*; and here in the text, *glory* and *majeſty* are aſcribed to him upon the account of his *wiſdom* and *goodneſs*.

That theſe belong to God, I ſhall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The heathens did conſtantly aſcribe greatneſs to God, and that as reſulting chiefly from his goodneſs, as appears by their frequent conjunction of theſe two attributes, *goodneſs* and *greatneſs*, *Opt. Max.* were their moſt familiar titles of the deity; to which I will add that known place of *Seneca*, *Primus deorum cultus eſt deos credere, dein reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine quâ nulla majeſtas.*

2. From ſcripture. It were endleſs to produce all thoſe texts wherein greatneſs and glory are aſcribed to God. I ſhall mention two or three. *Deut.* x. 17. *the Lord is a great God*; *Pſal.* xxiv. 10. he is called *the king of glory*;—civ. 1. he is ſaid to be *cloathed with majeſty and honour. The whole earth is full of his glory.* Hither belong all thoſe doxologies in the old and new Teſtament, wherein greatneſs, and glory, and majeſty are aſcribed to God.

From all which me may learn,

1. What it is that makes a perſon great and glorious, and what is the way to majeſty, *viz. real worth and excellency*, and particularly, that kind of excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is *goodneſs*; this is that which advanceth a perſon, and gives him a pre-eminence above all others; this caſts a luſtre upon a man, and *makes his face to ſhine. Ariſtotle* tells us, that *honour* is nothing elſe but the *ſignification of the eſteem which we have of a perſon for his goodneſs*; *for*, ſaith he, *to be good*, and *to do good, is the higheſt glory.* God's goodneſs is his higheſt glory; and there is nothing ſo glorious in any creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the glory which is due to his name; *Aſcribe ye greatneſs to our God*, Deut. xxxii. 3. *Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and power*, Pſal. xxix. 1. The glory and majeſty of God calls for our eſteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we ſhould *glorify God in our ſpirits*, by an inward eſteem and reverence of his majeſty. The thoughts of earthly majeſty will compoſe us to reverence: how much more ſhould the apprehenſions of the divine majeſty ſtrike an awe upon our ſpirits in all our addreſſes to him? *His excellency* ſhould *make us afraid*, and keep us from all ſaucy boldneſs and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the diſtance which is between the majeſty of God, and our meanneſs. And we ſhould *glorify him in our bodies*, with outward worſhip and adoration; that is, by all external ſignifications of reverence and reſpect; and we ſhould glorify him in our lives and actions. The higheſt glory a creature can give to God, is to endeavour to be like him, *ſatis illos coluit, quiſquis imitatus eſt*, Sen. Hereby we manifeſt and ſhew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed to the divine perfections. And in caſe of ſin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holineſs, who hates ſin; and of his juſtice, which will puniſh it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it is *the glory of God to paſs by a provocation.*

3. He ſhould take heed of robbing God of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by aſcribing thoſe titles, or that worſhip to any creature, which is due to God alone. This is the reaſon which is given of the ſecond Commandment; *I the Lord am a jealous God.* God is jealous of his honour, *and will not give his glory to another, nor his praiſe to graven images*, Iſa. xlii. 8. Upon this acccount we find the Apoſtle reproves the idolatry of the heathens, becauſe thereby they debaſed the eſteem of God, and did ſhew they had unworthy thoughts of him, *Rom.* i. 21, 23. *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations: and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things.* Hereby they denied the glorious excellency of the divine nature; that is, that he is a ſpirit, and ſo incapable of being repreſented by any material or ſenſible image.

Secondly, I come now to ſpeak of the *ſovereignty* and *dominion* of God: In which I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the *ſovereignty* and *dominion* of God. By theſe we mean the full and abſolute right, and title, and authority which God hath to, and over all his creatures, as his creatures, and made by him. And this right reſults from the effects of that goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom, whereby all things are and were made; from whence there doth accrue to God a *ſovereign* right and title to all his creatures, and a full and abſolute authority over them; that is, ſuch a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any ſuperior, nor is ſubject and accountable to any, for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is called *ſummum imperium*, becauſe there is no power above it to check or controul it, and therefore there can be no greater than this. And it is *abſolute*, becauſe all the creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodneſs, and therefore they owe all poſſible duty and perpetual ſubjection ſo long as they continue in being, becauſe it is ſolely by his power and goodneſs that they continue; and therefore whatever right or title any one can pretend to any perſon or thing, *that God* hath to all things; *in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that *ſovereignty* and *dominion* ſignifies a full right, and title, and propriety in all his creatures, and an abſolute authority over them, to govern them and diſpoſe of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaſeth, that is not contrary to his eſſential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural ſtate and condition of the creature.

And for our better underſtanding of this, and the preventing of miſtakes, which men are apt to fall into about the *ſovereignty* of God, I will ſhew,

I. Wherein it doth not conſiſt. And,

II. Wherein it doth conſiſt.

I. Wherein it doth not conſiſt.

1. Not in a right to gratify and delight himſelf in the extream miſery of innocent and undeſerving creatures: I ſay, not in a *right*; for the *right* that God hath in his creatures, is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obligations they have to him upon that account. Now there is none, who becauſe he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of *that*, a *right* to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madneſs, to doubt whether extreme and eternal miſery be not a greater evil than ſimple being is a good. I know they call it *phyſical goodneſs*; but I do not underſtand how any thing is the better for being called by a hard name. For what can there be that is *good* or *deſirable* in *being*, when it only ſerves to be a foundation of the greateſt and moſt laſting *miſery*? and we may ſafely ſay, that the juſt God will never challenge more than *an equitable right*. God doth not claim any *ſuch ſovereignty* to himſelf, as to cruſh and oppreſs innocent creatures without a cauſe, and to make them miſerable without a provocation. And becauſe it ſeems ſome have been very apt to entertain ſuch groundleſs jealouſies and unworthy thoughts of God, he hath given us his oath to aſſure us of the contrary. *As I live, ſaith the Lord, I have no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn and live.* So far is he from taking pleaſure in the miſery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in caſe of ſin and provocation, he would be much rather pleaſed, if ſinners would, by repentance, avoid and eſcape his juſtice, than that they ſhould fall under it. The good God cannot be glorified or pleaſed in doing evil to any, where juſtice doth not require it; nothing is further from infinite goodneſs, than to rejoice in evil. We account him a tyrant and a monſter of men, and of a deviliſh temper, that can do ſo; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good God, than to paint him out after ſuch a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The *ſoveregnity* of God doth not conſiſt in impoſing laws upon his creatures, which are impoſſible either to be underſtood or obſerved by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reaſonable creature, which, in reaſon, cannot be obliged by any power to impoſſibilities.

3. The *ſovereignty* of God doth not conſiſt in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to neceſſitate them to ſin, or effectually to procure the ſins of men, aud to puniſh them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holineſs, and juſtice, and goodneſs of God, ſo to the nature of a reaſonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deſerve puniſhment for what it cannot help. And men cannot eaſily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a ſecret deſign to circumvent the greateſt part of men into deſtruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot againſt heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raiſe a revenue of glory to his juſtice. There is no generous and good man, but would ſpit in that man's face, that ſhould charge him with ſuch a deſign; and if they who are but very drops of goodneſs, in compariſon of God, the infinite ocean of goodneſs, would take it for ſuch a reproach, ſhall we attribute *that* to the beſt being in the world, which we would deteſt and abominate in ourſelves?

II. Wherein the *ſovereignty* of God doth conſiſt.

1. In a right to diſpoſe of, and deal with his creatures in any way that doth not contradict the eſſential perfections of God, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impoſe what laws he pleaſeth upon his creatures, whether natural and reaſonable; or poſitive, of trial of obedience, provided they contradict not the nature of God, or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deſerved puniſhment in a caſe of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, ſo the evil he inflicts be ſhort of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther in a right when he pleaſeth to

annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it ſhould ſo ſeem good to him, though that creature have not offended him; becauſe what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaſeth. In theſe the *ſovereignty* of God conſiſts; and if there be any thing elſe that can be reconciled with the eſſential perfections of God.

Secondly, For the proof and confirmation of this. This is univerſally acknowledged by the heathens, that God is *the Lord and Sovereign of the world, and of all creatures.* Hence *Plato* calls him τῶν πάντων ἡγεμόνα; and *Tully*, *omnium rerum Dominum*, *Lord of all*; and this the ſcripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him *Lord of all*, *King of kings*, and *Lord of lords*; to which we may refer all thoſe doxologies, in which power, and dominion, and authority are aſcribed to God. I will only mention that eminent confeſſion of *Nebuchadnezzar*, a great king, who when his underſtanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge, that *God was the moſt high*, Dan. iv. 34, 35. I infer,

Firſt, Negatively we cannot, from the *ſovereignty* of God, infer a right to do any thing that is unſuitable to the perfection of his nature; and conſequently that we are to reſt ſatisfied with ſuch a notion of *dominion* and *ſovereignty* in God, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of *juſtice* and *goodneſs*: nay, it would be little leſs than a horrid and dreadful blaſphemy, to ſay that God can, out of his ſovereign will and pleaſure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of God, and the eſſential perfections of the deity; or to imagine that the pleaſure, and will of the holy, and juſt, and good God, is not always regulated and determined by the eſſential and indiſpenſable laws of goodneſs, and holineſs, and righteouſneſs.

Secondly, Poſitively; we may infer from the *ſovereignty* and *dominion* of God,

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge God for *our lord* and *ſovereign*, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himſelf a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmoſt poſſibility of our love, *to love him with all our hearts, and ſouls, and ſtrength*; becauſe the ſouls that we have, he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift; and when we render theſe to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable ſubjection, and obſervance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmoſt of our endeavours, to conform ourſelves to his will, and to thoſe laws which he hath impoſed upon us.

4. In caſe of offence and diſobedience, we are, without murmuring, to ſubmit to what he ſhall inflict upon us, *to accept of the puniſhment of our iniquity*, and *patiently to bear the indignation of the Lord*, becauſe we have ſinned againſt *him*, who *is our Lord and Sovereign.* 8

SERMON

SERMON LXXXIII.

The Wiſdom of GOD in the Creation of the WORLD.

PSALM civ. 24.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.

I Am treating of the attributes and properties of God, particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding, which I told you are his *knowledge* and *wiſdom*. I have finiſhed the *firſt*, the *knowledge* of God. The laſt day I ſpake, concerning the *wiſdom* of God in general; but there are *three* eminent arguments and famous inſtances of God's *wiſdom*, which I have reſerved for a more large and particular handling. The wiſdom of God ſhines forth in the creation of the world, in the *government* of it, and in the *redemption* of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt. Of theſe *three* I ſhall ſpeak ſeverally.

I begin with the *firſt*, the argument of God's *wiſdom*, which the creation doth furniſh us withal. In this viſible frame of the world, which we behold with our eyes, which way ſoever we look, we are encountered with ocular demonſtrations of the *wiſdom* of God. What the Apoſtle ſaith of the *power* of God is true likewiſe of his *wiſdom*, Rom. i. 20. *The inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead:* So the *eternal wiſdom* of God is underſtood *by the things which are made*. Now the *creation* is an argument of the *wiſdom* of God, as it is an effect of admirable counſel and wiſdom. As any curious work or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; ſo the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitneſs of the works of God, argue the *infinite wiſdom* of him who made them; a work ſo beautiful and magnificent, ſuch a ſtately pile as heaven and earth is, ſo curious in the ſeveral pieces of it, ſo harmonious in all its parts, every part ſo fitted to the ſervice of the whole, and each part for the ſervice of another; is not this a plain argument that there was *infinite wiſdom* in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I ſhall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things which we ſee with our eyes, which we call the *world* or the *creation*, is contrived after the beſt manner, and hath upon it evident impreſſions of counſel and wiſdom. I grant the *wiſdom* of God is infinite, and that many of the ends and deſigns of his *wiſdom* are *unſearchable, and paſt finding out*, both in the works of creation and providence; and that *though a wiſe man ſeek to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end, he ſhall not be able to do it*; and we ſhall never be able to exhauſt all the various wiſdom and contrivance which is in the works of God; though the oftener, and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we ſhall ſee to admire in them; the more we ſtudy this book of the creation, the more we ſhall be aſtoniſhed at the wiſdom of the author: but this doth not hinder, but that we may diſcover ſomething of the wiſdom of God, though it be infinite. As the effects of *infinite power* may fall under our *ſenſes*, ſo the deſigns of *infinite wiſdom* may fall under our *reaſon* and *underſtanding*; and when things appear to our beſt reaſon plainly to be ordered for the beſt, and the greateſt advantages of the world and mankind, ſo far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwiſe, as they might have been a hundred thouſand ways, they would not have been ſo well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwiſe, is the reſult of *wiſdom*.

Now the wiſdom of God in the creation will appear by conſidering the works of God. Thoſe who have ſtudied nature, can diſcourſe theſe things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect ſkill in *aſtronomy*, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in *anatomy*, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, ſo it would probably be above moſt of your capacities; therefore I ſhall content myſelf with ſome general and more obvious inſtances of the divine wiſdom, which ſhine forth ſo clear in his works, that *he that runs may read it*.

1. I ſhall take a ſhort ſurvey of the ſeveral parts of the world.

2. Single out *man*, the maſter-piece of the viſible creation.

1. If we ſurvey the world, and travel over the ſeveral parts of it in our thoughts, we ſhall find that all things in it are made with the greateſt exactneſs, ranged in the moſt beautiful order, and ſerve the wiſeſt and beſt ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of that which is moſt viſible, the ſun, you ſee how by the wiſe order and conſtancy of its courſe it makes day and night, winter and ſummer. This the Pſalmiſt takes notice of, *Pſal.* xix. 1, 2. *The heavens declare the glory of God*; *and the firmament ſheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth ſpeech*; *and night unto night ſheweth knowledge*. It may eaſily be imagined many ways, how the ſun might have had another courſe in reference to the earth; but no man can deviſe any other, that ſhould not be very much to the prejudice of the world; ſo that this being the beſt, it is an argument that wiſdom had the ordering and diſpoſing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we ſhall ſee *gods aſcending and deſcending*; I mean clear repreſentations of divine wiſdom in the treaſures that are hid in the bowels of it, and thoſe fruits that grow upon the ſurface of it. What vaſt heaps, and what variety of uſeful materials and minerals are ſcattered up and down in the earth as one would think with a careleſs hand, but yet ſo wiſely diſperſt, as is moſt proper for the neceſſities and uſes of ſeveral countries! Look upon the ſurface of the earth, and you ſhall find it cloathed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and uſefulneſs. Look upon the vaſt ocean, and there you may ſee the wiſdom of God in bridling and reſtraining that unruly element, I mean, in ſinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and covered the earth, and then the earth had been in a great meaſure uſeleſs, and incapable of thoſe inhabitants which now poſſeſs it.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air, and ſea, and you ſhall find all theſe inhabited and furniſhed with great ſtore of living creatures of ſeveral kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endowed with ſtrong inclination to increaſe their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones; and every kind of theſe creatures armed either with ſtrength or wit to oppoſe their enemy, or ſwiftneſs to fly from him, or ſtrong holds to ſecure themſelves. But the creation is a vaſt field, in which we may eaſily loſe ourſelves. I ſhall therefore call home our wandering thoughts; for we need not go out of ourſelves for a proof of divine wiſdom. I ſhall therefore,

2. Select the choiceſt piece of it, *man*, who is the top and perfection of this viſible world. What is ſaid of the elephant, or *behemoth*, *Job* xl. 19. in reſpect of the vaſt bigneſs and ſtrength of his body, is only abſolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput*, *the chief of the ways of God*, *and upon earth there is none like him*. Man is *mundi utriuſque nexus*, *the bond of both worlds*, as *Scaliger* calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of ſpirits do meet, and unite; for in reſpect to his body, he is related to this viſible world, and is of the earth; but in reſpect of his ſoul, he is allied to heaven, and deſcended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the ſeveral repreſentations of God's wiſdom, and the ſeveral parts of the creation; but we have not yet conſidered the beſt piece of the viſible world, which we may ſpeak of, without flattery of ourſelves, and to the praiſe of our Maker. God when he had made the world, *he made man after his own image*. When he had finiſhed the other part of the creation, he was pleaſed to ſet up this picture of himſelf in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we ſhall a little more particularly conſider this piece of God's workmanſhip, being it is better known and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the reſt, and conſequently a higher inſtance of the divine wiſdom. It is obſerved by ſome, that concerning the parts of the creation, God ſpeaks the word, *Let there be light*, and *Let there be a firmament, and there was ſo*: but when he comes to make

man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into conſultation about him. *And God ſaid, let us make man in our image, after our likeneſs; and let him have dominion,* Gen. i. 26. as if *man*, above all the reſt, were the effect and reſult of divine wiſdom, and the creature of his counſel.

Man may be conſidered either in himſelf, and in reſpect of the parts of which he conſiſts ſoul and body; or with relation to the univerſe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Conſider him in himſelf, as compounded of ſoul and body. Conſider man in his outward and worſe part, and you ſhall find *that* to be admirable, even to aſtoniſhment; in reſpect of which, the Pſalmiſt cries out, *Pſal.* cxxxix. 14. *I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my ſoul knoweth right well.* The frame of our bodies is ſo curiouſly wrought, and every part of it ſo full of miracle, that *Galen* (who was otherwiſe backward enough to the belief of a God) when he had anatomiſed man's body, and carefully ſurveyed the frame of it, viewed the fitneſs and uſefulneſs of every part of it, and the many ſeveral intentions of every little vein, and bone, and muſcle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his Creator. And thoſe excellent books of his, *de uſu partium, of the uſefulneſs and convenient contrivance of every part of the body*, are a moſt exact demonſtration of the divine wiſdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, *Gaſſendus* ſaith, the whole work is writ with a kind of *enthuſiaſm*. The wiſdom of God, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious conſideration of the ſeveral parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate ſkill in *anatomy*, I chuſe rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unſkilfulneſs to be injurious to the divine wiſdom.

But this *domicilium corporis, the houſe of our body*, though it be indeed a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble *inhabitant* that dwels in it. This *cabinet*, though it be exquiſitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely ſhort in value of the *jewel* that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of reaſon and underſtanding exalt us above the reſt of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular proviſion for man, which it hath made for others creatures, becauſe it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reaſon. Man is not born cloathed, nor armed with any conſiderable weapon for defence; but he hath reaſon and underſtanding to provide theſe things for himſelf; and this alone excels all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himſelf warmer and ſafer; he can foreſee dangers, and provide againſt them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and by the advantage of his reaſon, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himſelf againſt their violence.

If we conſider the mind of man yet nearer, how many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there ſhould be at once in our underſtandings diſtinct comprehenſions of ſuch variety of objects; that it ſhould paſs in its thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things paſt, and take a proſpect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Becauſe we are familiar to our ſelves, we cannot be ſtrange and wonderful to ourſelves; but the great miracle of the world, is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent inſtance of God's wiſdom.

2. Conſider man with relation to the univerſe, and you ſhall find the wiſdom of God doth appear, in that all things are made ſo uſeful for man, who was deſigned to be the chief inhabitant of this viſible world, the gueſt whom God deſigned principally to entertain in this houſe which he built. Not that we are to think, that God hath ſo made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himſelf, and poſſibly for many other uſes than we can imagine; for we much over-value ourſelves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminiſh the wiſdom of God, in reſtraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the uſe and ſervice of man; and in reference to this end, you ſhall find that God hath made abundant and wiſe proviſion.

More particularly we will conſider man,

1. In his *natural* capacity, as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the ſervice and pleaſure, for the uſe and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little uſe? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and God has furniſhed him with many objects to exerciſe his under-

ſtanding upon, which would be ſo far uſeleſs and loſt, if man were not. Who ſhould obſerve the motions of the ſtars, and the courſes of thoſe heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of nature? Who ſhould pry into the ſecret virtues of plants, and other natural things, if there were not in the world, a creature endowed with reaſon and underſtanding? Would the beaſts of the field ſtudy aſtronomy, or turn chymiſts, and try experiments in nature?

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is there! which can be imagined to be of little other uſe but for the pleaſure of man. And if man had not been, they would have loſt their grace, and been trod down by the beaſts of the field, without pity or obſervation; they would not have made them into garlands and noſe-gays. How many ſorts of fruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of the reach of beaſts! and indeed they take no pleaſure in them. What would all the vaſt bodies of trees have ſerved for, if man had not been to build with them, and make dwellings of them? Of what uſe would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal, and the quarries of ſtone? Would the mole have admired the fine gold? Would the beaſts of the foreſt have built themſelves palaces, or would they have made fires in their dens?

2. Conſider man in his *geographical* capacity, as I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or that climate or country. The wiſdom of God hath ſo ordered things, that the neceſſities of every country are ſupplied one way or other. *Egypt* hath no rains; but the river *Nilus* overflows it, and makes it fruitful. Under the line, where there are exceſſive heats, every day there are conſtant gales and breezes of cool wind, to fan and refreſh the ſcorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furniſhed with materials for ſilk, a light cloathing; we that are cooler here in *England*, with materials for cloth, a warmer cloathing; *Ruſſia* and *Muſcovy*, which are extream cold, are provided with warm furrs, and ſkins of beaſts.

3. Conſider man in his capacity of *commerce* and *intercourſe*. Man is a *ſociable creature*; beſides the advantages of *commerce* with remoter nations, for ſupplying every country with thoſe conveniencies and commodities, which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wiſdom of God does plainly appear, in diſpoſing the ſea into ſeveral parts of the world, for the more ſpeedy commerce and intercourſe of ſeveral nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, *that* had been needleſs and ſuperfluous, becauſe they might have been had without commerce; beſides, that the great encouragement of intercourſe among nations, which is ſo agreeable to human nature, would have been taken away: If every country had been, as now it is, deſtitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no ſea to give an opportunity of traffick; the world had been very defective as to the uſe of man. Now here appears the wiſdom of God, that the world, and all things in it, are contrived for the beſt.

Thus I have endeavoured to do ſomething toward the diſplaying of God's wiſdom in the workmanſhip of the world; although I am very ſenſible how much I have been maſtered and oppreſſed by the greatneſs and weight of ſo noble an argument. For *who can declare the works of God! and who can ſhew forth all his praiſe!*

The uſe I ſhall of what has been ſaid, ſhall be in three particulars.

1. This confutes the *Epicureans*, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things to chance. Thoſe things which are the proper effects of counſel, and bear the plain impreſſion of wiſdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madneſs is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wiſeſt agent upon counſel and deſign had contrived them; and yet to aſcribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be ſo wiſely framed, muſt pick holes in the creation, and ſhew ſome fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any *anatomiſt* pretend to ſhew how the body of man might have been better contrived, and fitter for the uſes of a reaſonable creature than it is? or any *aſtonomer* to rectify the courſe of the ſun? As for the extravagant and plaſphemous ſpeech of *Alphonſus*, *That if he had ſtood at God's elbow when he made the world, he could have told him how to have made it better*; beſides his *pride*, it ſhews nothing but his *ignorance*; that he built his *aſtronomy* upon a falſe hypotheſis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that ſcience; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he miſtook the

frame of it: But thoſe who have been moſt verſed in nature, and have moſt pried into the ſecrets of it, have moſt admired the workmanſhip both of the great world, and the leſs.

But if we muſt ſuppoſe the world to be as well made as wiſdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monſtrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better ſay, *Archimedes* did not make any of his engines by ſkill, but by chance; and might more eaſily maintain, that cardinal *Richlieu* did not manage affairs by any arts or policy, but they fell out by meer chance. What pitiful ſhifts is *Epicurus* put to, when the beſt account he can give of the world, is this; *That matter always was, and the parts of it in motion, and after a great many trials, the parts of matter at length hampered themſelves in this fortunate order wherein they now are; that men, at firſt, grew out of the earth, were nouriſhed by the navel-ſtring, and when they were ſtrong enough, broke looſe and weaned themſelves; that the noſtrils were made by the waters making themſelves a paſſage out of the body; and the ſtomach and bowels by the waters forcing a paſſage downward; that the members of the body were not made for thoſe uſes for which they ſerve, but chanced to be ſo, and the uſes afterwards found out.* Is it worth the while to advance ſuch ſenſeleſs opinions as theſe, to deny the wiſdom of God? Is it not much eaſier, and more reaſonable to ſay, that the wiſdom of God made all theſe things, than to trouble ourſelves to imagine how all things ſhould happen thus conveniently by chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly diſpoſition of them required, done by chance, and without the direction of wiſdom and counſel? How long time might a man take to jumble a ſet of four and twenty letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact poem; yea, or to make a book of tolerable ſenſe, though but in proſe? How long might a man ſprinkle oil and colours upon canvas, with a careleſs hand, before this would produce the exact picture of a man? And is a man eaſier made by chance than his picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the world was made by chance, I could much more believe him, if he ſhould tell me that *Henry* the VII's chapel in *Weſtminſter* was not built by any mortal man, but the ſtones did grow in thoſe forms into which they ſeem to us to be cut and graven; that the ſtones, and timber, and iron, and braſs, and all the other materials came thither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themſelves into that delicate order, in which we ſee them ſo cloſe compacted, that it muſt be a great chance that parts them again. Now, is it not much eaſier to imagine how a ſkilful workman ſhould raiſe a building, and hew timber, and ſtones, than how that variety of materials, which is required to a great and ſtately building, ſhould meet together all of a juſt bigneſs, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themſelves into that order? I inſiſt the longer upon this, becauſe I am ſenſible how much atheiſm hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire and adore, and praiſe the *wiſdom* of God, *who hath eſtabliſhed the world by his wiſdom, and ſtretched out the heavens by his underſtanding; who hath made all things in number, weight, and meaſure*; that is, by exact *wiſdom*. The wiſe works of God are the proper object of our praiſe; and this is a day proper for the work of praiſe and thankſgiving. Now under the goſpel, ſince Chriſt was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praiſe and thankſgiving; but as God has given us Chriſt, ſo he hath given us our *beings*. We are not ſo to remember our *Redeemer*, as to forget our *Creator*. The goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom of God, which appears in the creation of the world, ought ſtill to be matter of admiration and praiſe to chriſtians. It is a great fault and neglect among chriſtians, that they are not more taken up with the works of God, and the contemplation of the wiſdom which ſhines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vaſt curious engine of the world, and the great Artificer of all things. It was truly ſaid by one, that moſt men are ſo ſtupid and inconſiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or a carver more than the works of God. There are many that have beſtowed more eloquence in the praiſe of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquiſite frame of the world, or any of the other works of God. We can admire the wiſdom, and deſign, and ſkill of petty artiſts, and little engineers; but *here* is *wiſdom* in the beauty and order of the *creation*. Did we love God, and take pleaſure in the effects of his

wiſdom and power, we ſhould be more in the contemplation of them. *Pſal.* cxi. 2. *The works of the Lord are great, ſought out of all them that have pleaſure therein:* Let us then ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches*, &c.

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulneſs, admire the wiſdom which hath made and diſpoſed all things ſo fitly for our uſe and ſervice, and with ſo merciful a reſpect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beaſts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Pſalmiſt often praiſing God upon this account, *Pſal.* cxxxvi. 4, 5, *&c.* The wiſdom which hath framed theſe bodies of ours, *Pſal.* cxxxix. 14, 15, 16. Which hath endowed us with knowledge and underſtanding. *Elihu* complains, that men were apt to overlook theſe great bleſſings of God. *Job* xxxv. 10, 11, 12. *But none ſaith, Where is God my maker, who gives ſongs in the night? who teacheth us more than the beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſer than the fowls of heaven? There they cry, but none giveth anſwer, becauſe of the pride of evil men.*

3. *Uſe.* Truſt the wiſdom of God, which made the world, to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wiſdom which hath framed thy body in ſo curious and exquiſite a manner, and formed thy ſpirit within thee, and hath made ſo many creatures with reference to thy neceſſity and comfort, truſt him for thy future proviſion. *Matt.* vi. 25. *I ſay unto you, Take no thought for your lives, what ye ſhall eat,* &c. *Is not the life more than meat? and the body than raiment?* He hath given us our ſouls; he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made theſe bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the leſs? When thou art ready anxiouſly and ſollicitouſly to ſay, What ſhall I do for the neceſſaries of life? Conſider whence thou didſt receive thy life, who made this body of thine, thou mayeſt be aſſured, that the wiſdom which hath created theſe, conſidered how to ſupply them; the wiſdom of God knew that you would want all theſe, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore *fear not.*

SERMON LXXXIV.

The Wiſdom of GOD in his Providence.

1 PETER v. 7.

Caſting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

Preached at *Kenſington.*

AMongſt the ſeveral duties which, towards the concluſion of this epiſtle, the Apoſtle exhorts chriſtians to, this is one, not to be over-much ſollicitous and concerned about what may befal us, but to refer ourſelves to the providence of God, which takes care of us. In ſpeaking to this argument, I ſhall

I. Conſider the nature of the duty here required, which is *to caſt our care upon God.*
II. The argument uſed to perſuade us to it: Becauſe *he careth for us.*

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word μέριμνα ſignifies an *anxious care* about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and diſquiet of mind about what may befal us; about the good that we hope for and deſire, or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the Apoſtle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the providence of God, and his care, all thoſe events which we are apt to be ſo ſollicitous and diſquieted about. The expreſſion ſeems to be taken out of *Pſal.* lv. 22. *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee.*

Now that we may not miſtake our duty in this matter, I ſhall ſhew what is not here meant by *caſting all our care upon God*; and then, what is meant by it.

The Apoſtle doth not here intend to take men off from *a provident care and diligence* about the concernments of this life; this is not only contrary to reaſon, but to many expreſs precepts and paſſages of ſcripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the bleſſing of God, and the good ſucceſs of our affairs promiſed thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for thoſe of our family, which cannot be done without ſome ſort of care; and wherein ſlothfulneſs and negligence are condemned, and threatened with poverty; ſo that this is not *to caſt our care upon God*, to take no care of ourſelves, to uſe no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we deſire, and the prevention of the evil we fear; this is to tempt the providence of God, and to caſt that burthen upon him, which he expects we ſhould bear ourſelves.

But by *caſting our care upon God*, the Apoſtle intends theſe *two things:*

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been uſed by us, we ſhould not be *farther ſollicitous*, nor trouble ourſelves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our Saviour's meaning, when he bids us *take no care for the morrow*. When we have done what is fit for us for the preſent to do, we ſhould not diſquiet and torment ourſelves about the iſſue and event of things.

2. *Caſting our care upon God*, implies, that we ſhould refer the iſſue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to diſpoſe all things to the beſt; entirely confiding in his wiſdom and goodneſs, that he will order all things for our good, and in that confidence reſolving to reſt ſatisfied and contented with the diſpoſals of his providence, whatever they be.

You ſee then the nature of the duty which the Apoſtle here exhorts to, *viz.* That after all prudent care and diligence have been uſed on our parts, we ſhould not be diſquieted in our minds about the event of things, but leave them to God, who hath the care of us, and of all our concernments. Which is the

II. Thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, and which I intend chiefly to inſiſt upon, *viz.* The Argument which the Apoſtle here uſeth to perſuade us to this duty, of *caſting all our care upon God*, becauſe *it is he that careth for us:* and this implies in it theſe *two* things.

1. In general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he takes a ſpecial care of them and their concerns; *He careth for you.* The Apoſtle ſpeaks this to them, not only as *men*, but as *chriſtians*. And thus the *Pſalmiſt*, from whom theſe words ſeem to be taken, does apply and limit this promiſe; *Caſt thy burthen upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee; he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.*

1. That God taketh care of us, implies in general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to us. I ſhall not now enter upon a large proof of *the providence of God*; that is too large and intricate an argument for a ſhort diſcourſe, and hath a great deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and though it be a fundamental principle of religion, and hath been almoſt generally entertained and believed by mankind, and that upon very good reaſon; yet becauſe the vindication of many particular appearances of providence, does in a great meaſure depend upon a full view and comprehenſion of the whole deſign, therefore we muſt neceſſarily refer ourſelves for full ſatisfaction, as to ſeveral difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we ſhall ſee God's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole deſign, and then many particular paſſages, which may now ſeem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themſelves, will, in relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of reaſon and regularity in them.

Therefore I ſhall at preſent only briefly, and in the general, ſhew that it is very credible, that there is a wiſe providence that governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events which happen to us.

And I deſire it may be obſerved in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this queſtion concerning *providence*, doth ſuppoſe *the being of God*, and that *he made the world*, as principles already known and granted, before we come to diſpute of his *providence*; for it would be vain to argue about the *providence* of God, with thoſe who queſtion his *being*, and whether *the world was made by him:* But ſuppoſing theſe *two* principles, *that God is*, and *that he made the world*, it is very credible that he ſhould *take care of the government of it*, and eſpecially of one of the nobleſt parts of it, the race of *mankind*. For we cannot believe, that he, who employed ſo much power and wiſdom in the raiſing of this great and magnificent pile, and furniſhing every part of it with ſuch variety of creatures, ſo exquiſitely, and ſo wiſely fitted for the uſe and ſervice of one another, ſhould ſo ſoon as he had perfected it, forſake his own workmanſhip, and take no further care of it; eſpecially conſidering that it is no trouble and diſquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpoſe for the regulating of any diſorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wiſdom, and power can do this with all imaginable eaſe, knows all things, and can do all things, without any diſturbance of its own happineſs.

And this hath always been the common apprehenſion of mankind, that God knows all things, and obſerves every thing that is done in the world, and when he pleaſeth, interpoſes in the affairs of it. It is true indeed, the *Epicureans* did deny that God either made the world, or governs it; and therefore wiſe men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of God, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of ſo odious an opinion, they were content, for faſhion ſake, to own his being, provided they might take away the beſt and moſt ſubſtantial arguments for the proof of it. The reſt of the philoſophers owned a providence, at leaſt a general providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not deſcend to a conſtant and particular care of every perſon, and every little event belonging to them, *Interdum curioſus ſingulorum*, ſays *Tully*; *Now and then, when he pleaſes, he takes care of particular perſons, and their leſſer concernments*; but many of them thought that God did generally neglect the ſmaller and more inconſiderable affairs of the world, *Dii minora negligunt neque agellos ſingulorum & viticulas perſequuntur, The Gods overlook ſmaller matters, and do not mind every man's little field and vine.* Such imperfect apprehenſions had they of the providence of God. And though they would ſeem hereby to conſult the dignity and eaſe of the deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of leſſer matters, yet, in truth and reality, they caſt a diſhonourable reflection upon him, as if it were a burthen to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodneſs, to take care of every thing.

But now divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by aſſuring us of God's particular care of all perſons and events. Our Saviour tells us, that God's providence extends to the leaſt and moſt inconſiderable creatures; *To the graſs of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is caſt into the oven*, Mat. vi. 30. *To the fowls of the air*, and that to the leaſt of them, even to *the ſparrows, two of which are ſold for a farthing, and yet not one of them falleth to the ground without God*, Mat. x. 29. Much more doth the providence of God extend to *men*, which are creatures far more conſiderable, and to the very leaſt thing that belongs to us, *to the very hairs of our head, which are all numbered*; the loweſt inſtance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more *general providence*; and divine revelation hath rectified thoſe imperfect apprehenſions which men had about it, and hath ſatisfied us, that it extends itſelf to *all particulars*, and even to the leaſt things and moſt inconſiderable. And this is no ways incredible, conſidering the infinite perfection of the divine nature, in reſpect of which, God can with as much and greater eaſe take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men therefore pray to God for the good they want, and to be freed from the evils they fear, becauſe they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men therefore make conſcience of their duty, becauſe they believe God obſerves them, and will reward and puniſh their good and evil deeds. So that take away the providence of God, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion ſtands; we rob ourſelves of one of the greateſt comforts, and beſt refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happineſs in the next.

And though there be many diſorders in the world, eſpecially in the affairs of man, the moſt irregular and intractable piece of God's creation; yet this is far from being a ſufficient objection againſt *the providence of God*, if we conſider that God made man a free creature, and capable of abuſing his liberty, and intends this preſent life for a ſtate of trial in order to another, where men ſhall receive the juſt recompence of their actions here: And then if we conſider, that many of the evils and diſorders, which God permits to happen, are capable of being over-ruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to ſerve wiſe and excellent purpoſes, and that the providence of God does ſometimes viſibly and remarkably interpoſe, for the prevention and remedy of great diſorders and confuſions; I ſay, conſidering all this, it is no blemiſh to the divine providence, to permit many of thoſe irregularities which are in the world, and ſuffer the fates of good and bad men to be ſo croſs and unequal in this life. For ſuppoſing another life after this, wherein men ſhall come to an account, and every man ſhall receive the juſt recompence of his actions, there will then be a proper ſeaſon and full opportunity of ſetting all things ſtrait, and no man ſhall have reaſon then, either to glory in his wickedneſs, or to complain of his ſufferings in this world. This is the *firſt*, that God's providence governs the world, and intereſts itſelf in the affairs of men, and diſpoſeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reaſon why we ſhould *caſt* our particular *cares upon him*, who hath undertaken the government of the whole.

2. The providence of God is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and eſpecial care of them. The Apoſtle ſpeaks this to chriſtians, *Caſt all your care on him, for he careth for you.* And this *David* limits in a more particular manner to good men; *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he will ſuſtain thee; he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.*

The providence of God many times preſerves good men from thoſe evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interpoſition, reſcues them out of thoſe calamities which it ſuffers others to fall into; and God many times bleſſeth good men with remarkable proſperity and ſucceſs in their affairs. To which purpoſe there are innumerable declarations and promiſes in the holy ſcriptures, ſo well known, that I ſhall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithſtanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are haraſſed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of God uſually ordereth it ſo, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find great comfort and ſupport under them, and make better uſe and improvement of them than others; ſo that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the Apoſtle aſſures us, *Rom.* viii. 28. *We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.* All the evils and afflictions which happen to good men, conſpire one way or other to the promoting of their happineſs, many times in this world, to be ſure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 2 *Cor.* iv. 17, 18. *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilſt we look not*, &c. And can we ſay God's providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal ſufferings with eternal glory: When through *many hardſhips and tribulations*, he at laſt brings us to *a kingdom?* Was *Joſeph* neglected by God, when by a great deal of hard uſage, and a long impriſonment, he was raiſed to the higheſt dignity in a great kingdom? Or rather, was not the providence of God very remarkable towards him, in making thoſe ſufferings ſo many ſteps to his glory, and the occaſion of his advancement? And is not God's providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulation and ſufferings; and making *our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?*

Thus you ſee what is implied in God's *care* of us in general; that he governs the world, and diſpoſeth all events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more eſpecial care of them. Let us now ſee of what force this conſideration is, to perſuade to the duty enjoined in the the text, *to caſt all your care upon God*; that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been uſed on our part, not to be anxious and ſollicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to God. Now this conſideration, that *God cares for us*, ſhould be an argument to us, *to caſt all our care upon him*, upon theſe *two* accounts:

1. Becauſe if *God cares for us*, our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands.

2. Becauſe all our anxiety and ſollicitude will do us no good.

1. Becauſe if *God cares for us*, our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and where we ſhould deſire to have them; infinitely ſafer than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great ſatisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all diſquieting thoughts; for if God undertakes the care of us, then we are ſure that nothing ſhall happen to us, but by the diſpoſal or permiſſion of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. There are may things indeed, which to us ſeem *chance* and *accident*; but in reſpect of God, they are *providence* and *deſign*; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill will and malicious intent of ſecond cauſes, but they are all wiſely deſigned; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the reſult of the deepeſt counſel, and the greateſt goodneſs. And can we wiſh that we and our concernments ſhould be in better or ſafer hands, than of infinite power and wiſdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodneſs? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean ourſelves towards God as we ought, we may reſt aſſured of his love and care of us; and if we do in good earneſt believe the providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to thoſe that love and ſerve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concernments, and that he can, and will diſpoſe them better for us, than we could manage them ourſelves, if we were left to ourſelves, and our affairs were put into *the hands of our own counſel.*

Put the caſe we had the entire ordering and diſpoſal of ourſelves, what were reaſonable for us to do in this caſe? We would ſurely, according to our beſt wiſdom and judgment, do the beſt we could for ourſelves; and when upon experience of our own manifold ignorance and weakneſs, we had found our weightieſt affairs and deſigns frequently to miſcarry, for want of foreſight, or power, or ſkill to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and diſappointments which human affairs are liable to, we ſhould then look about us; and if we knew any perſon much wiſer, and more powerful than ourſelves, who, we believed did heartily love us, and wiſh well to us, we would out of kindneſs to ourſelves, aſk his counſel in our affairs, and crave his aſſiſtance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wiſdom and good-will to us.

Now God is ſuch an one, he loves us as well as we do ourſelves, and deſires our happineſs as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are moſt conducing to it, and will moſt effectually ſecure it. And every man that believes thus of God, (as every man muſt do, that believes there is a God, for theſe are the natural and eſſential notions which all men have of the deity) I ſay, every man that believes thus of God; the firſt thing he would do (if he knew not already that God had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himſelf to God, and to beſeech him with all earneſtneſs and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments to him, and be pleaſed to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any demur or difficulty, give up himſelf wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to diſpoſe of him as to him ſhould ſeem beſt.

Now if God have prevented us herein, and without our deſire taken this care upon himſelf, we ought to rejoice in it, as the greateſt happineſs that could poſſibly have befallen us; and we ſhould without any farther care and anxiety, uſing our own beſt diligence, and ſtudying to pleaſe him, chearfully leave ourſelves in his hands, with the greateſt confidence and ſecurity, that he will do all that for us which is really beſt; and with a firm perſuaſion, that that condition, and thoſe circumſtances of life, which he ſhall chuſe for us, will be no other but the very ſame which we would chuſe for ourſelves, if we were as wiſe as he.

And it is ſo natural for men to think thus of God, that the very heathen poet had the ſame idea of him, and upon that ground, adviſeth us to commit all our concernments to him.

Permittes ipſis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebuſque ſit utile noſtris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptiſſima quæque dabunt dii;
Charior eſt illis homo, quam ſibi.

Leave it (ſays he) *to the wiſer gods, to conſider and determine what is fitteſt for thee, and moſt for thy advantage; and though they do not always give thee what thou deſireſt, and that which pleaſeth thee beſt, yet they will give that which is moſt fit and convenient for thee; for man is more dear to the gods, than he is to himſelf.* Not much different from this, is the divine counſel of *Solomon*, Prov. iii. 5, 6. *Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own underſtanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths.* It is conſiderable who it is that gives this advice; the *wiſeſt of the ſons of men*; and yet he adviſeth *to truſt in God for direction, and not to lean to our underſtandings.*

If therefore we be fully perſuaded of God's infinitely wiſe and good providence, we ought certainly to refer ourſelves to him, and perfectly to acquieſce in his diſpoſal, and to reſt ſatisfied in whatever he does; and whatever condition he aſſigns to us, we ought to be contented with it; if we be not, we find fault with his wiſdom, and reproach his goodneſs, and wiſh the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of God, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, ſo would it likewiſe ſilence all thoſe murmurings and diſcontents, which are apt to ariſe in us, when things fall out croſs to our deſires, when diſaſters and diſappointments happen to us, and the providence of God caſts us into ſickneſs, or poverty, or diſgrace. This quieted *David*, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which befel him; *I held my peace*, (ſays he) *and ſpake not a word, becauſe thou, Lord, didſt it.* And this likewiſe ſhould keep us from fretting and vexing at inſtruments and ſecond cauſes; to conſider that the wiſe providence of God over-ruleth and diſpoſeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permiſſion. This conſideration reſtrained *David*'s anger, under that high provocation of *Shimei*, when he followed him, reproaching him, and curſing him; *Let him alone; the Lord hath ſaid unto him, Curſe David.* He conſidered that God's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from an higher hand, this calmed his paſſion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the ſtreet, and one fling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a paſſion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity ſoever befalleth us, when we conſider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will ſtill and huſh our paſſion, and make us, with *Eli*, to hold our peace, or only to ſay, *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.*

We are, indeed, liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and reſtraint, and the loſs of our friends and near relations; and theſe are great afflictions, and very croſs and diſtaſteful to us; and therefore, when we are in danger of any of theſe, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious, and full of trouble; and when they befal us, we are prone to cenſure the providence of God, and to judge raſhly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the beſt: But we ſhould conſider, that we are very ignorant and ſhort-ſighted creatures, and ſee but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the deſigns of God, and to look to the end of his providence. We cannot (as *Solomon* expreſſeth it) *ſee the work of God from the beginning to the end*; whereas, if we ſaw the whole deſign of providence together, we ſhould ſtrangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and ſhould ſee it to be very wiſe and good. And that which, upon the whole matter, and in the laſt iſſue and reſult of things, is moſt for our good, is certainly beſt, how grievous ſoever it may ſeem for the preſent. Sickneſs cauſed by phyſick, is, many times, more troubleſome for the preſent, than the diſeaſe we take it for; but every wiſe man compoſeth himſelf to bear it as well as he can, becauſe it is in order to his health: The evils and afflictions of this life, are the phyſick, and means of cure, which the providence of God is often neceſſitated to make uſe of; and if we did truſt ourſelves in the hands of this great phyſician, we ſhould quietly ſubmit to all the ſeverities of his providence, in confidence that they would *all work together for our good.*

When children are under the government of parents, or the diſcipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied ſo many things which they deſire, and to be conſtrained by ſeverities to a great many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parent and the maſter know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconſiderateneſs which makes them to think ſo, and that when they come to years, and to underſtand themſelves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them ſo much diſcontent, was really for their good, and that it was their childiſhneſs and folly, which made them to think otherwiſe, and that they had, in all probability, been undone, had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and conſideration enough to truſt the diſcretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even thoſe things which were ſo diſpleaſing, to them would at laſt tend to their good.

There is a far greater diſtance between the wiſdom of God and men, and we are infinitely more ignorant and childiſh in reſpect of God, than our children are in reſpect of us; and being perſuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under God's care and diſcipline, it is neceſſary for our good, that we be reſtrained in many things, which we eagerly deſire: and ſuffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and *have put away childiſh thoughts*, and are come to underſtand things as they truly are, and not *in a riddle*, and darkneſs, as we now do; then *the judgment of God will break forth as the light, and the righteouſneſs* of all his dealings *as the noon day*; then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we ſhall ſee a plain reaſon for all thoſe diſpenſations which were ſo much ſtumbled at, and acknowledge the great wiſdom and goodneſs of them.

You ſee then what reaſon there is to refer ourſelves to the providence of God, and *to caſt all our care upon him*, to truſt him with the adminiſtration and diſpoſal of our concernments, and firmly to believe, that if we love God, and be careful to pleaſe him, every thing in the iſſue will turn to the beſt for us; and therefore we ſhould not anxiouſly trouble ourſelves about the events of things, but reſign up ourſelves to the good pleaſure of him, who diſpoſeth all things *according to the council of his will*, entirely truſting in his goodneſs, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us; that he will order all things for us, for the beſt, referring the ſucceſs of all our concernments to him, *in whoſe hands are all the ways of the children of men*, chearfully ſubmitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence, in every caſe.

And this is a proper expreſſion of our confidence in God's wiſdom and goodneſs, to refer things to him before the event, and to ſay with the chriſtians, *Acts* xxi. 14. *The will of the Lord be done*; becauſe this ſhews that we are perſuaded that God will do better for us, than our own council and choice; and to ſubmit to his will after the event, is likewiſe a great inſtance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is beſt: For when God, by his providence, declares his will in any caſe, we ſhould look upon it as the ſentence of a wiſe and juſt judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquieſce, and reſt fully ſatisfied.

And this may well be expected from us chriſtians, who have much greater aſſurance of the *particular* providence of God, than the heathens had; and yet ſome of them were able to free themſelves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and diſcontent. Upon this conſideration, *Epictetus* (as *Arrian* tells us) would expreſs himſelf thus: *I had always rather have that which happens; becauſe I eſteem that better which God wills, than that which I ſhould will.* And again, *Lift up thine eyes* (ſays he) *with confidence to God, and ſay, Henceforth, Lord, deal with me as thou pleaſeſt*, ὁμογνωμονῶ σοι, ἴσος εἰμί· *I am of the ſame opinion with thee, juſt of the ſame mind that thou art; I refuſe nothing that ſeems good to thee; lead me where thou wilt; cloathe me with what garments thou pleaſeſt; ſet me in a publick place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or baniſh me from it; beſtow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and ſtruggle with poverty, which of theſe thou pleaſeſt*, ἐγώ σοι ὑπὲρ ἁπάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἀπολογήσομαι. *If men ſhall cenſure this providence towards me, and ſay, Thou dealeſt hardly with me; I will apologize for thee, I will undertake and maintain thy cauſe, that what thou doſt is beſt for me.* What could a chriſtian ſay more or better, by way of reſignation of himſelf to the providence of God? It almoſt tranſports me to read ſuch paſſages from an *heathen*, eſpecially if we conſider in what condition *Epictetus* was; he had a maimed and deformed body, was in the extremity of poverty, a ſlave, and cruelly and tyrannically uſed, ſo that we can hardly imagine a man in worſe and more wretched circumſtances; and yet he juſtifies the providence of God in all this, and not only ſubmits to his condition, but is contented with it, and embraces it; and ſince God hath thought it fitteſt and beſt for him, he is of the ſame mind, and thinks ſo too. I confeſs, it doth not move me to hear *Seneca*, who flowed with wealth, and lived at eaſe, to talk magnificently, and to ſlight poverty and pain, as not worthy the name of evil and trouble: but to ſee *this poor man*, in the loweſt condition, and worſt circumſtances of humanity, bear up ſo bravely, and with ſuch a chearfulneſs and ſerenity of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and this not out of ſtupidity, but from a wiſe ſenſe of the providence of God, and a firm perſuaſion of the wiſdom and goodneſs of all his dealings, *this*, who can chuſe but be affected with it, as an admirable temper for a *chriſtian*, much more for a *heathen!* To which we may apply that ſaying of our Lord, concerning the heathen centurion, *Verily I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no, not in Iſrael*; ſo wiſe, ſo equal, ſo firm a temper of mind is ſeldom to be found, *no, not amongſt chriſtians.* And this is the firſt conſideration, That if *God cares for us*, we and our concernments are in the beſt and ſafeſt hands, and therefore we ſhould *caſt all our care upon God.* The

2d is, Becauſe all our anxiety and care will do us no good; on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own ſpirits, and make them reſtleſs, in the contemplation of the evils and diſappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miſerable, in the ſad reflections of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care, controul the courſe of things, and alter the deſigns of providence; we cannot, by all our vexation and trouble, over-rule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our Saviour uſeth to this very purpoſe, *Mat.* vi. 27. *Which of you, by taking thought can add one cubit to his ſtature?* So that all this trouble is unreaſonable, and to no purpoſe, becauſe it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and diſpoſed by an higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate, and contrive, and uſe our beſt endeavours for the effecting of our deſigns, but we cannot ſecure the event againſt a thouſand interpoſitions of divine providence, which we can neither fore-ſee, nor hinder; but yet, notwithſtanding, theſe our endeavours are reaſonable, becauſe they are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and though they may miſcarry, yet they are all we can do: But after this is done, trouble and anxiety about the event is the vaineſt thing in the world, becauſe it is to no purpoſe, nor doth at all conduce to what we deſire; *we diſquiet ourſelves in vain*, and we diſtruſt God's providence and care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and diſappoint us.

Let us then, by theſe conſiderations, be perſuaded to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual and univerſal uſe in the whole courſe of our lives; in all our affairs and concernments, after we have uſed our beſt endeavours, let us ſit down and be ſatisfied, and refer the reſt to God, whoſe providence governs the world, and takes care of all our intereſts, and of the intereſt of his church and religion, when they ſeem to be in greateſt danger.

We cannot but be convinced that this is very reaſonable, to leave the management of things to him who made them, and therefore underſtands beſt how to order them. The government of the world, is a very curious and complicated thing, and not to be tampered with by every unſkilful hand; and therefore, as an unſkilful man, after he hath tampered a great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at laſt convinced that he can do no good upon it, carries it to him that made it, to mend it, and put it into order; ſo muſt we do, after all our care and anxiety about our own private concernments, or the publick ſtate of things; we muſt give over governing the world, as a buſineſs paſt our ſkill, as a province too hard, and *a knowledge too wonderful for us*, and leave it to him, who made the world, to govern it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus affected and diſpoſed, we do not believe the providence of God, whatever profeſſion we make of it; if we did, it would have an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious care and diſcontent. Were we firmly perſuaded of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine providence, we ſhould confidently rely upon it, and, according to the apoſtle's advice here in the text, *caſt all our care upon him, becauſe he careth for us.*

SERMON LXXXV.

The Wiſdom of God, in the Redemption of Mankind.

1 COR. i. 24.

——*Chriſt, the power of God, and the wiſdom of God.*

I HAVE, in the ordinary courſe of my preaching, been treating of the attributes and perfections of God, more particularly thoſe which relate to the divine underſtanding; the *knowledge* and *wiſdom* of God. The *firſt* of theſe I have finiſhed; and made ſome progreſs in the *ſecond*, the *wiſdom* of God: which I have ſpoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to conſider thoſe famous inſtances and arguments of the divine wiſdom, in the *creation* of the world; the *government* of it; and the *redemption of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt.* The *two* firſt of theſe I have ſpoken to, namely the *wiſdom* of God, which appears in the *creation* and *government* of the world. I come now to the

III^d^ inſtance of the divine wiſdom, *the redemption of mankind by Jeſus Chriſt*; which I ſhall, by God's aſſiſtance, ſpeak to from theſe words, *Chriſt the wiſdom of God.*

The apoſtle, in the beginning of this epiſtle, upon occaſion of his mentioning the diviſions and parties that were among the *Corinthians*, where one ſaid, *I am of Paul*; another, *I am of Apollos*; aſks them, whether *Paul was crucified for them?* or, whether *they were baptized in the name of Paul?* To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them, at the 14th and 15th verſes, that *he had not ſo much as baptized any of them, except two or three*; ſo far was he from having baptized them into his own name; and at the 17th verſe, he ſays, that his work, his principal work, was *to preach the goſpel*, which he had done, not with human eloquence, *not in wiſdom of words*, but with great plainneſs and ſimplicity, *leſt the croſs of Chriſt ſhould be made of none effect*; leſt, if he ſhould have uſed any artifice, the goſpel ſhould have been leſs powerful. And, indeed, his preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the goſpel did ſeem to very many to be a fooliſh and ridiculous thing. The ſtory which they told of *Chriſt crucified*, was *to the Jews*, a *ſtumbling-block, and to the Gentiles fooliſhneſs.* The *Jews*, who expected another kind of *Meſſias*, that ſhould come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal prince, were angry at the ſtory of *a crucified Chriſt.* The *Greeks*, the philoſophers, who expected ſome curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and ſimple relation of Chriſt, and of the goſpel.

But though this deſign of the goſpel appeared ſilly and fooliſh to raſh and inconſiderate and prejudiced minds; yet *to them that are called*, to them that do believe, *both Jews and Gentiles, Chriſt, the power of God, and the wiſdom of God*; *Chriſt*, that is, the way of our redemption by *Jeſus Chriſt*, which the apoſtle preached, *the wiſdom of God*, an eminent inſtance of it.

So that the *redemption of man by Jeſus Chriſt*, is a deſign of admirable *wiſdom.* This I ſhall endeavour to confirm to you.

I. By general teſtimonies of ſcripture. And,

II. By a more particular enquiry into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed.

I. By the teſtimonies from ſcripture. You know I have all along, in my diſcourſes of the attributes of God, uſed this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of ſcripture: But now I muſt forſake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wiſdom of the *creation* is manifeſt in *the things which are made*; *the heavens declare the glory of God's* wiſdom, *and the firmament ſhews his handy-work.* The works of God do preach and ſet forth the wiſdom of the Creator; but the ſun, moon, and ſtars do not preach the *goſpel.* The wiſdom of *redemption* is *wiſdom in a myſtery, hidden wiſdom, which none of the princes* or philoſophers *of this world knew.* The ſharpeſt wits, and the higheſt and moſt raiſed underſtandings amongſt the heathens, could ſay nothing of this. Here *the wiſdom of the wiſe*, and *the underſtanding of the prudent* is poſed, and we may make the apoſtle's challenge, *ver.* 20. of this chapter, *Where is the wiſe? where is the diſputer of this world?* There is no natural light diſcovers Chriſt; the *wiſe men* cannot find him out, unleſs a *ſtar* be created on purpoſe to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I ſhall only depend upon divine revelation. 1 *Cor.* ii. 7, 8. the *goſpel* is called *the wiſdom of God in a myſtery, even the hidden wiſdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew.* Eph. i. 7, 8. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveneſs of ſins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wiſdom and prudence.* Eph. iii. 10, 11. *The manifold wiſdom of God, according to the eternal purpoſe which he purpoſed in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.* This work of *our redemption by Jeſus Chriſt*, is ſo various and admirable, that it is not below the angels to know and underſtand it; *To the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known the manifold wiſdom of God.*

II. By enquiring more particularly into the nature of this deſign, and the means how it is accompliſhed. This is *wiſdom,* to fit means to ends; and the more difficult the end, the greater wiſdom is required to find out ſuitable and ſufficient means for the accompliſhment of the end. Now the *wiſdom of redemption* will appear, if we conſider the caſe of fallen man; and what fit, and proper, and ſuitable means the wiſdom of God hath deviſed for our recovery.

Firſt, Let us conſider the caſe of fallen man, which was very ſad, both in reſpect of the miſery, and the difficulty of it.

1. In reſpect of the miſery of it. Man, who was made holy and upright by God, having by his voluntary tranſgreſſion, and wilful diſobedience, fallen from him, did preſently ſink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miſerable and curſed condition, of which heaven and earth, and his own conſcience, bore him witneſs. Man being become a ſinner, is not only deprived of the image of God, but is liable to his juſtice; here was his miſery.

2. The difficulty of the caſe was this; man could not recover himſelf, and raiſe himſelf out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; ſo that our help is only in God; and, indeed, he is a merciful God, and doth not deſire our ruin, nor delight in our deſtruction: But ſuppoſe his mercy never ſo willing to ſave us, will not his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth check thoſe forward inclinations of his goodneſs, and hinder all the deſigns of his mercy? Is not ſin contrary to the holy nature of God? Hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? Hath not he threatened it with heavy and dreadful puniſhment? and ſaid, that *the ſinner ſhall die*, that *he will not acquit the guilty*, nor *let ſin go unpuniſhed?* Should he now, without any ſatisfaction to his offended juſtice, pardon the ſinner, remit his puniſhment, and receive him to favour; would this be agreeable to his holineſs, and juſtice, and truth? Would this become the wiſe governor of the world, who loves righteouſneſs, and order; who hates ſin, and is obliged, by the eſſential rectitude of his nature, to diſcountenance ſin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of God. The mercy of God pities our miſery, and would recover us, would open *paradiſe* to us: but there is a *flaming ſword* that keeps us out; the incenſed juſtice of God, that muſt be ſatisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally ruin'd; if he ſpares us, how ſhall *mercy and juſtice meet together?* how ſhall God at once expreſs his love to the ſinner, and his hatred to ſin? here is the difficulty of our caſe.

II. Let us now enquire what means the wiſdom of God uſeth for our recovery. The wiſdom of God hath deviſed this expedient to accommodate all theſe difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and juſtice of God. The Son of God ſhall undertake this work, and ſatisfy the offended juſtice of God, and repair the ruined nature of man. He ſhall bring God and man together, make up this gulph, and renew the commerce and correſpondence between God and us, which was broken off by ſin. The work that God deſigns, is the redemption of man, that is, his recovery from a ſtate of ſin and eternal death, to a ſtate of holineſs and eternal life. The Son of God is to engage in this deſign of our redemption, to ſatisfy the offended juſtice of God towards us, ſo as to purchaſe our deliverance from the wrath to come, and ſo as to reſtore us to the image and favour of God, that we may be ſanctified, and be made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this, we will conſider,

1. The fitneſs of the perſon deſigned for this work.
2. The fitneſs of the means whereby he was to accompliſh it.

1. The fitneſs of the perſon deſigned for this work, and that was the *eternal Son of God*; who, in reſpect of his infinite wiſdom and power, the dignity and credit of his perſon, his dearneſs to his Father, and intereſt in him, was very fit to undertake this work, to mediate a reconciliation between God and man.

2. The fitneſs of the means whereby he was to accompliſh it; and theſe I ſhall refer to *two* heads, his *humiliation*, and *exaltation*. All the parts of theſe are very ſubſervient to the deſign of our redemption.

I. The *humiliation* of Chriſt, which conſiſts of *three* principal parts; his *incarnation*, his *life*, and his *death*.

1. His *incarnation*, which is ſet forth in ſcripture by ſeveral expreſſions; his being *made fleſh, and dwelling among us*, John i. 14. His being *made of the ſeed of David according to the fleſh*, Rom. i. 3. His being *made of a woman*, Gal. iv. 4. The *manifeſtation of God in the fleſh*, 1 Tim. iii. 16. His *taking part of fleſh and blood*, Hebr. ii. 14. His *taking on him the ſeed of Abraham*, and *being made like unto his brethren*, Hebr. ii. 16, 17. His *coming in the fleſh*, 1 John ii. 2. All which ſignifies his taking upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as God. The eternal Son of God, in the fulneſs of time, took our nature; that is, aſſumed a real ſoul and body into union with the divine nature. Now this perſon, who was really both God and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our redemption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle perſon to interpoſe in this difference, and take up this quarrel between God and man. Being both God and man, he was concerned for both parties, and intereſted both in the honour of God, and the happineſs of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one, by ſuch ways as might be conſiſtent with the other.

More particularly, his *incarnation*, did fit him for thoſe *two* offices which he was to perform in his humiliation, of *prophet* and *prieſt*.

1. The office of *prophet*, to teach us both by his *doctrine*, and his *life*.

By his doctrine. His being in the likeneſs of *man*; this made him more familiar to us. He was *a prophet raiſed up from among his brethren*, as *Moſes* ſpake, and he makes this an argument why we ſhould hear him. Should God ſpeak to us immediately by himſelf, we *could not hear him, and live*. God condeſcends to us, and complies with the weakneſs of our nature, and *raiſeth up a prophet from among our brethren*; we ſhould *hear him*. And then his being *God*, did add credit and authority to what he ſpake; he could confirm the doctrine which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his *life*, I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak preſently.

2. For the office of *prieſt*. He was fit to be our *prieſt*, becauſe *he was taken from among men*, as the apoſtle ſpeaks; fit to ſuffer, as being *man*, having a *body prepared*, as it is, *Hebr*. x. 5. and fit to *ſatisfy*, by his ſufferings, for the ſins of all men, as being *God*, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them; the ſufferings of an *infinite perſon*, being equal to the offences done againſt an *infinite God:* And thus the *mercy* of God is exalted without the diminution of his *juſtice*.

And as his *incarnation* did qualify him for ſuffering, ſo for compaſſion, and fellow-ſuffering with us, *Hebr*. ii. 17, 18. *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to* *be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-prieſt, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the ſins of the people; for in that he himſelf hath ſuffered, being tempted, he is able to ſuccour them that are tempted.*

2. His *life* was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holineſs and goodneſs. I might go through all the parts of it; but becauſe I intend to be very ſhort upon theſe heads, I ſhall only take notice of that part of his life, which was ſpent in his publick miniſtry; *he went about doing good*; the *doctrine* that he preached was calculated for the deſtroying of ſin, and the promoting of holineſs; the great end and deſign of it was to advance righteouſneſs, and goodneſs, and humility, and patience, and ſelf-denial; to make us mortify out ſenſual deſires, and brutiſh paſſions, to contemn and renounce this preſent world; and this being the deſign of it, it was a moſt proper engine to demoliſh the works of the devil: And to make way for the entertainment of his *doctrine*, the whole frame of his *life*, and all the circumſtances of it, did contribute. His *life* was the practice of his *doctrine*, and a clear comment upon it. The meanneſs of his condition in the world, that he had no ſhare of the poſſeſſions of it, were a great advantage to his doctrine of ſelf-denial, and contempt of the world. *The captain of our ſalvation*, that he might draw off our affections from the world, and ſhew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himſelf have no ſhare in it: *Matth.* viii. 20. *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have neſts, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* The mean circumſtances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his deſign; for had he not been ſtripped of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been ſo free from ſuſpicion of a worldly intereſt and deſign; nay, he could not have been ſo conſiderable; he was really *greater* for his meanneſs. The very heathens did account this true greatneſs, (as we find in *Ariſtotle*) not to admire the pleaſures, and greatneſs, and pomp of the world. And that his meanneſs might be no diſadvantage to him, thoſe evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderful things that he did, rendered him conſiderable, and gained more reverence and authority to his doctrine, than his meanneſs could bring contempt upon it.

Beſides, the manner of his converſation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very ſweet and converſable and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himſelf to them in the moſt humane ways, to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine. The miracles that he wrought, did confirm his doctrine beyond all exception, as being a divine teſtimony, and ſetting the ſeal of God to the truth of it; yet becauſe many were blinded with prejudice, and though they *did ſee*, yet *would not ſee*, Chriſt *the wiſdom of God* did ſo order the buſineſs of his miracles, to make them humane ways of winning upon them, for they were generally ſuch as were beneficial; *he healed all manner of diſeaſes* and *maladies* by this miraculous power; and ſo his miracles did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were *benefits*; this was a ſenſible demonſtration to them, that he *intended* them good, becauſe he did them good; they would eaſily believe, that he, who healed their bodies, would not harm their ſouls. This for his *life*.

III. His *death*, which was the loweſt ſtep of his humiliation, and the conſummation of his ſufferings. Now the death of Chriſt did eminently contribute to this deſign of our redemption. The death of Chriſt did not only expiate the guilt of ſin, and pacify conſcience, by making plenary ſatisfaction to the divine juſtice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of ſin in us: *Rom.* vi. 6. *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of ſin might be deſtroyed, that henceforth we might not ſerve ſin.* Rom. viii. 3. *God ſending his own Son in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh, and for ſin* (that is, by being a ſacrifice for ſin) *condemned ſin in the fleſh.* The death of Chriſt convinceth ſin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, becauſe the impartial juſtice of God did ſo ſeverely puniſh it in his own Son, when he appeared in the perſon of a ſinner; and this is the moſt powerful argument to us to crucify ſin, that it crucified our Saviour. That ſo innocent and holy a perſon ſhould ſuffer ſo cruel and ignominious a death for our ſins, ſhould ſet us for ever againſt it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumſtances of Chriſt's ſufferings, are with admirable wiſdom fitted for the conquering of ſin and ſatan. Sin came by the *woman:* The *ſeed of the woman* ſuffers for ſin; and by ſuffering, conquers it. Sin began in the *garden*; and there our Saviour began his ſufferings for ſin. Sin came by the tree; and Chriſt bears the curſe of it *in hanging upon the tree,* and crucifies it by his croſs.

And as he conquered ſin, ſo he overcame ſatan by his own arts. The devil found Chriſt in the likeneſs of man, he judged him mortal, and his great deſign was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. Chriſt permits him to bring about his deſign; he lets him enter into *Judas*; he lets the *Jews* crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great ſtone upon it: But here his *divine wiſdom* appears, in ruining the devil by his own deſign, and *ſnaring him in the works of his own hands,* Hebr. ii. 14. *By death he deſtroys him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*

I know the ſufferings of Chriſt were, by the *wiſe of the world,* made the great objection againſt the *wiſdom* of this diſpenſation; the *croſs of Chriſt was to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*; and yet the *wiſeſt* of them had determined otherwiſe in general, though not in this particular caſe. *Plato* (in the ſecond book of his *Commonwealth*) ſaith, "That a man may be a perfect pattern of juſtice and righteouſneſs, "and be approved by God and men, he muſt be ſtripped of all the things of this "world; he muſt be poor and diſgraced, and be accounted a wicked and unjuſt "man; he muſt be whipped, and tormented, and crucified as a malefactor;" which is, as it were, a prophetical deſcription of our Saviour's ſufferings. And *Arrian,* in his *Epict.* deſcribing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls the Apoſtle, the meſſenger, the preacher, and miniſter of God, ſaith, "He muſt be "without houſe and harbour, and worldly accommodations; muſt be armed with "ſuch patience for the greateſt ſufferings, as if he were a ſtone, and devoid of "ſenſe; he muſt be a ſpectacle of miſery and contempt of the world." So that, by the acknowledgement of theſe *two* wiſe heathens, there was nothing in the ſufferings of Chriſt that was unbecoming the *wiſdom of God,* and improper to the end and deſign of Chriſt's coming into the world; beſides, that they ſerved a further end, which they did not dream of, *the ſatisfying of divine juſtice.*

Secondly, His *exaltation.* The ſeveral parts of which, his *reſurrection,* and *aſcenſion,* and *ſitting at the right hand of God,* were eminently ſubſervient to the perfecting and carrying on of this deſign.

The *reſurrection* of Chriſt, is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he delivered, *Rom.* i. 4. *declared to be the Son of God with power,* ὁρισθέντος υἱοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει, *by the reſurrection from the dead.* This great miracle of his *reſurrection* from the dead, did *determine* the controverſy, and put it out of all doubt and queſtion, that he was the *Son of God.* And then his *aſcenſion,* and *ſitting at the right hand of God,* this gives us the aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality, and is a demonſtration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlaſting glory and happineſs. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleaſures and enjoyments of this life, than the aſſurance of eternal life and happineſs?

And then the conſequents of his *exaltation,* they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The ſending of the holy Ghoſt *to lead us into all truth,* to ſanctify us, to aſſiſt us, and to comfort us under the greateſt troubles and afflictions; and the powerful *interceſſion* of Chriſt in our behalf; and his *return to judgment*; the expectation whereof, is the great argument to repentance, and holineſs of life: *Acts* xvii. 30, 31. *And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Becauſe he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.* And thus I have endeavoured to prove, that the *redemption of man by Jeſus Chriſt,* is a deſign of *admirable wiſdom.*

The *uſe* I ſhall make of it, is to convince us of the unreaſonableneſs of unbelief, and the folly and madneſs of impenitency.

Firſt, The unreaſonableneſs of unbelief. The goſpel reveals to us the wiſe counſel and diſpenſation of God for our redemption; and thoſe who diſbelieve the goſpel, *they reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves,* as it is ſaid of the unbelieving *Phariſees* and Lawyers, *Luke* vii. 30. The goſpel reveals to us a deſign ſo reaſonable and full of *wiſdom*, that they who can diſbelieve it are deſperate perſons, devoted to ruin. 1 *Cor.* i. 18. *The croſs of Chriſt is to them that periſh fooliſhneſs.* 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. *But if our goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, leſt the light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt, who is the image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them.* The goſpel carries ſo much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but ſuch whoſe eyes are blinded by the devil and their luſts.

He that will duly weigh and conſider things, and look narrowly into this *wiſe diſpenſation* of God, ſhall find nothing to object againſt it; nay, ſhall diſcover in it the greateſt motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reaſonable, eſpecially if it be for our advantage. Now this *wiſe diſpenſation* of God is not only reaſonable in itſelf, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our underſtandings, and ſatisfy our intereſt; why ſhould we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The deſign of the goſpel is *reaſonable*, and gratifies our underſtandings. And in this reſpect, the goſpel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety and holineſs, and real goodneſs among men; and the more any religion advanceth theſe, the more reaſonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the divine nature; fear of puniſhment, and hopes of pardon and rewards. Now the goſpel repreſents all theſe to the greateſt advantage.

1. It repreſents the perfections of God to the greateſt advantage, eſpecially thoſe which tend moſt to the promotion of piety, and the love of God in us; his *juſtice* and *mercy*.

(1.) His *juſtice*. The goſpel repreſents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any caſe let ſin go unpuniſhed. The impartiality of the divine juſtice appears in this diſpenſation, that when God pardons the ſinner, yet he will puniſh ſin ſo ſeverely in his own Son, who was the ſurety. Now, what could more tend to diſcountenance ſin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His *mercy*. This diſpenſation is a great demonſtration of the mercy, and goodneſs, and love of God, in ſending his Son to die for ſinners, and in ſaving *us* by devoting and ſacrificing *him*, John iii. 16. *For God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.* Rom. v. 8. *But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we are yet ſinners, Chriſt died for us.* 1 John iv. 9, 10. *In this was manifeſt the love of God towards us, becauſe God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be the propitiation for our ſins.* Now this repreſentation of God's mercy and love, which the goſpel makes, is of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to God.

2. The ſecond argument to piety, is fear of puniſhment. The goſpel hath revealed to us the miſery of thoſe who continue in their ſin; it hath made clear and terrible diſcoveries of thoſe torments which attend ſinners in another world, and hath opened to us the treaſures of God's wrath; ſo that now under the goſpel, *hell is naked before us, and deſtruction hath no covering*; and this is one thing which makes the goſpel ſo powerful an engine to deſtroy ſin, *Rom.* i. 16, 18. *The goſpel is the power of God unto ſalvation; for therein is the wrath of God revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men.*

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the goſpel the moſt powerful inſtrument to take men off from ſin, and engage them to holineſs, that can be imagined. The means to draw men from ſin, when they are once awakened with the fear of vengeance, is hopes of pardon and mercy, and the way to encourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from ſin, the goſpel promiſes pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holineſs, the goſpel opens heaven to us, and ſets before us everlaſting glory and happineſs, and gives us the greateſt aſſurance of it.

This is the *firſt*, the deſign of the goſpel is *reaſonable*, in that it does eminently and directly ſerve for the ends of piety and religion.

II. This diſpenſation of God *is beneficial* to us, and ſatisfies our intereſt; and this adds to the unreaſonableneſs of our unbelief, this deſign of God being not only *reaſonable in itſelf*, but *deſirable to us*, that it ſhould be ſo; becauſe of the eminent advantages that redound to us by it. The deſign of the goſpel is to deliver us from the guilt and dominion of ſin, and the tyranny of ſatan; to reſtore us to the image and favour of God; and by making us partakers of a divine nature, to bring us to eternal life. And is there any thing of real advantage which is not comprehended in this? Is it not deſirable to every man, that there ſhould be a way whereby our guilty conſciences may be quieted and appeaſed; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell? Is it not deſirable to be freed from the ſlavery of our luſts, and reſcued from the tyranny and power of the great deſtroyer of ſouls? Is it not deſirable to be like God, and to be aſſured of his love and favour, who is the beſt friend, and the moſt dangerous enemy; and to be ſecured, that when we leave this world, we ſhall be unſpeakably happy for ever? Now the goſpel conveys theſe benefits to us; and if this be the caſe of the goſpel, and there be nothing in this deſign of our redemption, but what is wiſe and reaſonable, and exceedingly for our benefit and advantage; why ſhould any man be ſo averſe to the belief of it? Why ſhould unbelief be counted a piece of wit? Is it wit to ſet ourſelves againſt reaſon, and to oppoſe our beſt intereſt? It is wickedneſs, and prejudice, and inconſiderateneſs, which diſbelieves the goſpel. Thoſe who do conſider things, welcome this good news, and embrace theſe glad tidings. *Wiſdom is juſtified of her children.* To them who are truly ſenſible of their own intereſt, and willing to accept of reaſonable evidence, this is not only *a true ſaying*, but *worthy of all acceptation*; *that Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners.*

Secondly, This doth convince men of the madneſs and folly of impenitency. Now ſince the *wiſdom* of God hath contrived ſuch a way of our recovery, and by the declaration of God's wrath, and diſpleaſure againſt ſin, hath given us ſuch arguments to repentance, and by diſcovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath given us ſuch encouragement to repentance, how great muſt the folly of impenitency be? For conſider,

1. That impenitency directly ſets itſelf againſt the *wiſdom of God.* If after all this we continue in our ſins, *we reject the counſel of God againſt ourſelves*, *we* deſpiſe the *wiſdom* of God, and *charge* that *with folly:* and we do it *againſt* our ſelves, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our ſins, and cheriſh our luſts, we directly oppoſe the end of our redemption, we contradict the great deſign of the goſpel, we contemn the admirable contrivance of *God's wiſdom*, who ſent his Son into the world on purpoſe to deſtroy ſin; for we uphold *that* which he came to deſtroy, 1 *John*. iii. 5. *Ye know that he was manifeſted to take away our ſins.* Now ſhall we continue in ſin, when we know *the Son of God was manifeſted to take away ſin?* God cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out *the riches of his wiſdom* in this deſign, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to God, and injurious to ourſelves; it is ſuch a madneſs, as if a condemned man ſhould deſpiſe a pardon; as if a priſoner ſhould be fond of his fetters, and refuſe deliverance; as if a man deſperately ſick ſhould fight with his phyſician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the *wiſdom of God*, which hath contrived our recovery, *we forſake our own mercy, and neglect a great ſalvation*; *we love death, and hate our own ſouls*, Prov. viii. 34, 35, 36.

2. Conſider, we cannot expect *the wiſdom of God* ſhould do more for our recovery, than hath been already done; *the wiſdom of God* will not try any further means. Mat. xxi. 37. *Laſt of all he ſent his Son.* If we deſpiſe this way, if we *tread under foot the ſon of God, and count the blood of the covenant, whereby we are ſanctified, an unholy thing, there would remain no more ſacrifice for ſin*, Heb. x. 26, 29. What can expiate the guilt of ſin, if the blood of Chriſt do not? What ſhall take us off from ſin, what ſhall ſanctify us, if *the blood of the covenant* be ineffectual? We reſiſt our laſt remedy, and make void the beſt means the wiſdom of God could deviſe for our recovery, if, after the revelation of the goſpel, we continue in our ſins.

3. If we fruſtrate this deſign of *God's wiſdom* for our recovery, our ruin will be the more dreadful and certain. Impenitency under the goſpel will increaſe our miſery. *If Chriſt had not come, we had had no ſin*, in compariſon of what we now have; *but now our ſin remains, and there is no cloak for our ſin*, πρόφασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν. We ſhall not be able at the day of judgment to preface any thing by way of excuſe or apology for our impenitency. What ſhall we be able to ſay to the *juſtice*

of God, when that ſhall condemn us, who rejected his *wiſdom*, which would have ſaved us? We would all be ſaved, but we would be ſaved without repentance: now *the wiſdom of God* hath not found out any other way to ſave us from hell, but by ſaving us from our ſins. And thou that wilt not ſubmit to this method of *divine wiſdom*, take thy courſe, and let us ſee *how thou wilt eſcape the damnation of hell.* I will conclude all with thoſe dreadful words which *the wiſdom of God* pronounceth againſt thoſe that deſpiſe her, and refuſe to hearken to her voice, *Prov.* i. 24, 25, 26. *Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed, I have ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have ſet at nought my council, and would none of my reproof: I alſo will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.* They who will not comply with the *council of God* for their happineſs, they ſhall inherit the condition which they have choſen to themſelves; *they ſhall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.*

SERMON LXXXVI.

The Juſtice of GOD in the Diſtribution of Rewards and Puniſhments.

GEN. XVIII. 25.

Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?

IN treating of the *attributes* of God, I have conſidered *thoſe* which relate to *the divine underſtanding*, viz. *knowledge* and *wiſdom*; I come now to conſider *thoſe* which relate to *the divine will*, viz. theſe *four*, the *juſtice*, the *truth*, the *goodneſs*, and the *holineſs* of God. I begin with the *firſt*, namely, the *juſtice* of God.

At the 17th *verſe* of this *Chapter*, God by a great and wonderful condeſcenſion of his goodneſs, reveals to *Abraham* his intention concerning the deſtruction of *Sodom*; upon this *Abraham*, *v.* 23. interceded with God for the ſaving of the righteous perſons that were there; and to this end, he pleads with God his *juſtice* and *righteouſneſs*, with which he apprehended it to be inconſiſtent *to deſtroy the righteous with the wicked*, which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general deſtruction. *Wilt thou alſo deſtroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou alſo deſtroy, and not ſpare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from thee; ſhall not the judge of all the earth do right?* This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* that is, *undoubtedly he will.* This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that *in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments, the Judge of the world will do righteouſly.*

So that the argument that lies under our conſideration, is the *juſtice of God in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments*: For the clearing of which, we will conſider it,

Firſt, In *Hypotheſi*, in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by *Abraham* in the text.

Secondly, In *Theſi*, we will conſider it in general, in *the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.*

Firſt, We will conſider it in *Hopotheſi*, in regard to the particular caſe which is here put by *Abraham* in the text; and the rather, becauſe if we look well into it, there is ſomething of real difficulty in it, not eaſy to be cleared; for *Abraham*'s reaſoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with God in the deſtruction of *Sodom*, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the ſame common deſtruction. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous ſhould be as the wicked, that be far from thee; ſhall not the judge of all the earth do right?* as if he had ſaid, *Surely the judge of all the earth will never do ſo unrighteous a thing.*

And yet notwithſtanding this, we ſee it is very uſual for the providence of God to involve good men in general calamities, and to make no viſible difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked.* Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile theſe appearances of providence with this reaſoning of *Abraham* in the text.

And for doing of this, I ſee but one poſſible way, and that is this, that *Abraham* does not here ſpeak concerning the judgments of God which befal men in the ordinary courſe of his providence, which many times happen promiſcuouſly, and involve good and bad men in the ſame ruin; and the reaſon hereof is plain, becauſe God in his ordinary providence does permit the cauſes, which produce theſe judgments, to act according to their own nature, and they either *cannot* or *will not* make any diſtinction; for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two ſorts of cauſes, either thoſe which we call *natural,* or thoſe which are *voluntary. Natural* cauſes, ſuch as wind and thunder, and ſtorms, and the infection of the air, and the like; theſe acting by a neceſſity of nature, without any knowledge or choice, *can* make no diſtinction between the good and bad. And the *voluntary* cauſes of calamities, as men are, they many times *will* make no difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked*; nay, many times they are maliciouſly bent againſt the *righteous,* and the effects of their malice fall heavieſt upon them. Now we ſay that things happen in the way of ordinary providence, when *natural* cauſes are permitted to act according to their *nature,* and *voluntary* cauſes are left to their liberty; and therefore in the courſe of ordinary providence, it is not to be expected that ſuch a diſtinction ſhould be made; it is neither poſſible, nor does juſtice require it; it is not poſſible, ſuppoſing natural cauſes left to act according to their nature, and voluntary cauſes to be left to their liberty; nor does juſtice require it, for every man is ſo much a ſinner, that no evil that befals him in this world, can be ſaid to be unjuſt in reſpect of God.

So that *Abraham* is not here to be underſtood, as ſpeaking of ſuch judgments as befal men in the ordinary courſe of God's providence, in which, if the good and bad be involved alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwiſe, nor is there any injuſtice in it; but *Abraham* here ſpeaks of miraculous and extraordinary judgments, which are immediately inflicted by God for the puniſhment of ſome crying ſins, and the example of the world to deter others from the like. And ſuch was this judgment, which God intended to bring upon *Sodom,* and which *Abraham* hath relation to in this diſcourſe of his. In *this* caſe it may be expected from the *juſtice* of God, that a difference ſhould be made between the *righteous* and the *wicked*; and that for theſe reaſons:

1. Becauſe this is a judgment which God himſelf executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of its cauſe, but an act of God, as a *judge.* Now it is eſſential to a judge to make a diſcrimination between the good and the bad, ſo as to puniſh the one, and to ſpare the other; and this is as neceſſary to all *proper acts of judgment* in this world, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a *particular* judgment, and the other the *general* judgment of the whole world.

2. When God goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in puniſhing, it may reaſonably be expected that he ſhould make a difference between the good and the bad; for the reaſon why he does not in his common providence, is becauſe he will not break and interrupt the eſtabliſhed order of things upon every little occaſion: But when he does go beſides the common courſe of things in puniſhing, the reaſon ceaſeth, which hindred him before from making a difference; and it is reaſonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a *miraculous judgment,* a *miraculous difference* ſhould be made. Without making this difference, the end of theſe miraculous judgments would not be attained, which is, remarkably to puniſh the crying ſins of men, and by that example to deter others from the like ſins: But if theſe judgments ſhould fall promiſcuouſly upon the *righteous* and the *wicked,* it would not be evident, that they were deſigned for the puniſhment of ſuch ſins, when men did ſee,

that they fell likewiſe upon thoſe who were not guilty of thoſe ſins, and conſequently the example could not be ſo effectual to deter men from ſin.

Upon all theſe accounts you ſee that *Abraham*'s reaſoning was very ſtrong and well grounded, as to thoſe judgments which are *miraculous* and *extraordinary*, and *immediately inflicted* by God, for the *puniſhment* of great and heinous ſins, which was the caſe he was ſpeaking of. And accordingly we find, that in thoſe judgments which have been *immediately* and *miraculouſly* inflicted by God, he hath always made this difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked*. In the *deluge* which he brought upon the old world, the ſpirit of God gives this reaſon why the judgment was ſo univerſal, becauſe *all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth*; and the reaſon why he ſaved *Noah* and his family was, becauſe in this general corruption of mankind he alone was righteous; *Thee have I ſeen righteous before me in this generation.* So likewiſe in that miraculous judgment of *Korah* and his company, when *God made a new thing, and the earth opened her mouth to ſwallow them up*, none periſhed but *he* and *his complices*; the reſt had warning given them by God to *remove from the tents of thoſe wicked men.* Thus you ſee that as to the particular caſe in the text, *Abraham*'s reaſoning concerning the *juſtice* of God is very firm and concluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principally intended to diſcourſe upon, *viz.* to conſider the *juſtice of God in general, in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.* And here I cannot but grant, that the beſt evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonſtrations of the *power*, and *wiſdom*, and *goodneſs* of God, in this vaſt and admirable frame of things which we ſee; but we muſt ſtay till *the day of judgment* for a clear and full manifeſtation of *the divine juſtice*; for which reaſon *the day of judgment* is in ſcripture called, *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* But in the mean time we may receive ſufficient aſſurance of this, both from *natural reaſon*, and from *divine revelation.*

1. From *natural reaſon*, which tells us, that *God loves righteouſneſs*, and *hates iniquity*, and conſequently that it muſt be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to diſcountenance the *other*; that is, to give ſome publick teſtimony of his liking and affection to the *one*, and of his hatred and diſlike of the *other*; which cannot otherwiſe be done, but by *rewards* and *puniſhments.*

But however the heathen reaſoned about this matter, whatever premiſes they laid, they firmly believed the concluſion, that *God is juſt. Plato* lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, “That God is in no wiſe unjuſt, but as righteous “as is poſſible; and that we cannot reſemble God more, than in this quality and “diſpoſition.” So likewiſe *Seneca* tells us, “That the Gods are neither capable of “receiving any injury, nor of doing any thing that is unjuſt.” *Antoninus*, the great emperor and philoſopher, ſpeaking doubtfully, whether good men are extinguiſhed by death, or remain afterwards; “If it be juſt, ſays he, you may be ſure it is ſo; “if it be not juſt, you may certainly conclude the contrary; for God is juſt, and “being ſo, he will do nothing that is unjuſt or unreaſonable.” And indeed the heathen philoſophers looked upon this as the great ſanction of all moral precepts, that God was the *witneſs* and the *avenger* of the breach and violation of them, *Qui ſecus faxit, deus ipſe vindex erit*; *If any man do contrary to them, God himſelf will puniſh it*; which ſhews, that there is a *natural awe* upon the minds of men of the *divine juſtice*, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2d place, from *ſcripture*, or *divine revelation.* And thoſe texts which I ſhall produce to this purpoſe, may be reduced to theſe *two* heads; either ſuch as prove the *rectitude of the divine nature*, and his *juſtice* in general; or ſuch as ſpeak more particularly of the *juſtice* and *equity* of his providence *in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments.* I begin, *firſt*, with thoſe which declare the *rectitude of the divine nature*, and the *juſtice* of God in general, and that either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, *injuſtice* and *unrighteouſneſs*, at the greateſt diſtance from him.

1. Thoſe which attribute this perfection to God. I ſhall mention but a few of many, *Pſal.* cxxix. 4. *The Lord is righteous.* Dan. ix. 7. *O Lord! righteouſneſs belongeth unto thee.* This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of God, *Ezra* ix. 15, *O Lord God of Iſrael, thou art righteous.* And this

the worſt of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity *Ex.* ix. 27. then *Pharaoh ſaid, The Lord is righteous.* This hath been likewiſe acknowledged by thoſe who have lain under the greateſt temptation to doubt of it, Jer. xii. 1. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet, let me talk with thee of thy judgments; wherefore doth the way of the wicked proſper?* The prophet, notwithſtanding he ſaw the proſperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted ſtate of the godly, which ſeemed hard to be reconciled with the *juſtice* of God's providence: yet before he would ſo much as reaſon about it, he lays down this as a certain concluſion, *Righteous art thou, O Lord.* To this head likewiſe belong all thoſe texts which ſpeak of *righteouſneſs,* as *God's dwelling-place,* and *his throne,* of his *delight in juſtice,* and of the *duration* and *eternity* of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewiſe other texts, which remove the contrary, *viz. injuſtice* and *unrighteouſneſs* at the greateſt diſtance from God, as being moſt contrary to his nature and perfection. *Deut.* xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor accepting of perſons, nor taking of gifts.* Job. viii. 3. *Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert juſtice?* which is a vehement negation of the thing. *Job.* xxxiv. 10, 11, 12. *Far be it from God, that he ſhould do wickedneſs, and from the Almighty, that he ſhould commit iniquity. For the work of a man ſhall he render unto him, and cauſe every man to find according to his ways. Yea, ſurely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Rom. ix. 14. *What ſhall we ſay then? is there unrighteouſneſs with God? God forbid.*

Secondly, There are other texts which ſpeak more particularly of *the juſtice and righteouſneſs of God in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments,* It is true indeed, the *juſtice* of God doth not conſtantly appear in this world in the diſpenſations of his providence, becauſe this is a time of patience and forbearance to ſinners, and of tryal and exerciſe to good men; but there is a day a coming, when all things ſhall be ſet ſtraight, and every man ſhall receive the juſt reward of his deeds, when the *juſtice* of God ſhall be evident to all the world, and every eye ſhall ſee it, and ſhall acknowledge *the righteous judgment* of God; and this the ſcripture moſt clearly and expreſly declares unto us; and hence it is, that *the day of judgment* is called *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* The *righteouſneſs* of God doth not now ſo clearly appear, but that there are many clouds over it; but there ſhall be *a day of revelation,* when the *righteouſneſs* of God ſhall be made manifeſt to all the world.

The *remunerative juſtice* of God ſhall then appear in the rewarding the righteous; and the *punitive juſtice* of God in puniſhing the wicked and ungodly; *ſo that a man ſhall ſay, verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth the world.*

Now the *righteouſneſs* of this vengeance of God, which God will take upon ſinners, is further ſet forth to us in ſcripture, from the *equity* and *impartiality* of it.

I. From the *equity* of it.

1. In that the ſins of men have juſtly deſerved the puniſhment, that ſhall come upon them, *Rom.* i. 32. *Who knowing the judgment of God,* δικάιωμα τȣ̃ Θεȣ̃, *the righteous judgment of God, that they which commit ſuch things, are worthy of death.*

2. In that the judgment of God ſhall be proportioned to the degree and heinouſneſs of mens ſins, ſo as the leſſer or greater ſins ſhall be puniſhed with more or leſs ſeverity. So our Saviour threatens to thoſe who continue impenitent under the goſpel, and the advantages of it, their caſe ſhall be more ſad than *that* of *Tyre* and *Sidon,* and *it ſhall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment, than for them.* Mat. xi. 21, 22. and *Luke* xii. 47, 48. There you have different degrees of puniſhment threatened, proportionable to the aggravations of the ſins which men have committed; *The ſervant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his will, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes: but he that knew it not, but did commit things worthy of ſtripes, ſhall be beaten with few ſtripes;* and ſo proportionably of all other aggravations of ſins, *for to whom much is given, of him ſhall much be required; and unto whom men have committed*

much, of him they will aſk the more. So likewiſe God will vindicate the contempt of the *goſpel* more ſeverly than of the *law*, becauſe the confirmation of it is clearer, and the ſalvation offered by it greater. *Heb.* ii. 3, 4. *If the word ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward, how ſhall we eſcape?* &c. And ſo, *Heb.* x. 28, 29. *He that deſpiſed Moſes his law, died without mercy under two or three witneſſes, of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?* &c.

II. The *righteouſneſs* of this judgment is further ſet forth to us in ſcripture by the *impartiality* of it. Hither belong all thoſe texts, which remove from God that προσωποληψία, that *reſpect of perſons*, which is ſo incident to human tribunals. Now *reſpect of perſons* is in diſtribution of juſtice, and hath regard to ſome external qualities or circumſtances of the perſons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cauſe, and upon account of thoſe circumſtances, to deal unequally with thoſe, whoſe caſe is equal; as when two perſons, who are equally guilty of a crime, are brought to their tryal, and the one is condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the account of friendſhip, or relation, or ſome other intereſt, becauſe one is poor, and the other rich, the one hath powerful friends to intercede for him, the other not, the one brings a gift or bribe, the other not, or upon any other account, beſides the pure merits of the cauſe; I ſay to deal thus in the diſtribution of juſtice, is *reſpect of perſons.* Otherwiſe in matters of mere grace and favour *reſpect of perſons* hath no place, according to that common rule of divines, προσωποληψία *locum non habet in gratuitis, ſed in debitis.* Now this the ſcripture every where ſpeaks of, as a thing very far from God. *Deut.* x. 17. *The Lord your God is the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not perſons, nor taketh rewards.* 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor reſpect of perſons, nor taking of gifts.* Job xxxiv. 18, 19. *Is it fit to ſay to a king, Thou art wicked? or to princes, Ye are ungodly? how much leſs to him that accepteth not the perſons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they are all the work of his hands.* Rom. ii. 6. *Who will render to every man according to his deeds: for there is no reſpect of perſons with God.* Acts x. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no reſpecter of perſons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.* Eph. vi. 8, 9. The Apoſtle there preſſeth the duties of ſervants to maſters, from this conſideration, that *whatſoever good thing any man doth, the ſame ſhall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free*; and at the 9th verſe, *Ye maſters, do the ſame thing unto them, forbearing threatning; knowing that your maſter alſo is in heaven, neither is there reſpect of perſons with him.* He maketh this likewiſe an argument, why men ſhould not oppreſs and deal deceitfully one with another, *Col.* iii. 25. *But he that doth wrong, ſhall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no reſpect of perſons.* And in general, St. *Peter* urgeth this conſideration upon all men to deter them from ſin in any kind, 1 *Pet.* i. 17. *And if ye call on the father, who without reſpect of perſons judgeth according to every man's work, paſs the time of your ſojourning here in fear.*

And beſides that the ſcripture doth remove this at the greateſt diſtance from God, it gives us alſo ſeveral inſtances of the *impartiality of the divine juſtice*, that it is not to be perverted and turned aſide by any of thoſe extrinſical conſiderations which commonly ſway with men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and intreaties. *Mat.* vii. 21, 22. *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven*, &c. The *divine juſtice* is not to be impoſed upon by good words, and external ſhews, and falſe profeſſions; ſo neither by any external relation to him; *For many ſhall come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and ſhall ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, but the children of the kingdom ſhall be caſt out into utter darkneſs.*

And however men may bear up themſelves *now* upon their worldly greatneſs and power, certainly there is *a time coming*, when the greateſt perſons in the world, thoſe who overturn kingdoms, and lay waſte countries, and oppreſs and ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own luſts and ambition, I ſay there is *a day a coming*, when even *theſe*, as much, nay, more than others, ſhall fear and tremble before the *impartial juſtice* of God. *Rev.* vi. 15. *And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman and every freeman ſhall hide themſelves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand?* The *impartial juſtice* of God will treat the greateſt and the meaneſt perſons alike. *Rev.* xx. 12. *I ſaw the dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of thoſe things which were written in the books according to their works.* All judged *according to their works.*

I ſhould next proceed to vindicate *the juſtice of God in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments*, from thoſe *objections*, which ſeem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to ſatisfy one queſtion, which hath occaſioned great diſputes in the world, and that is, how far *juſtice*, eſpecially as to *the puniſhment of offenders*, is *eſſential to God?* And for the clearing of this matter, I ſhall briefly lay down theſe propoſitions.

Firſt, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every *perfection* is *eſſential* to God, and cannot be imagined to be ſeparated from the divine nature, becauſe this is the natural notion which men have of God, that he is a *being that hath all perfection.*

Secondly, The actual conſtant exerciſe of thoſe divine perfections, the effects whereof are *without himſelf*, is not *eſſential* to God. For inſtance, though God be *eſſentially powerful* and *good*, yet it is not neceſſary, that he ſhould *always exerciſe* his power and goodneſs, but at ſuch times, and in ſuch a manner, as ſeems beſt to his *wiſdom*; and this is likewiſe true of his *wiſdom* and *juſtice*, becauſe *theſe* are perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon ſomething *without himſelf.*

Thirdly, It is *eſſential* to God to love goodneſs, and hate ſin, where-ever he ſees them. It is not neceſſary there ſhould be a world, or reaſonable creatures in it: but upon ſuppoſition that God makes ſuch creatures, it is agreeable to the divine nature, to give them good and righteous laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to diſcourage them from doing that which is evil; which cannot be done, but by *rewards* and *puniſhments*; and therefore it is agreeable to the perfection of the divine nature, *to reward goodneſs*, and *to puniſh ſin.*

Fourthly, as for thoſe rewards which the goſpel promiſeth, and the puniſhments which it threatens, there is ſome difference to be made between the *rewarding* and *puniſhing juſtice* of God.

1. As for that abundant *reward* God is pleaſed to promiſe to good men, the *promiſe* of it is founded in his *goodneſs*, and the *performance* of that promiſe, in his *juſtice*; for it is *juſtice* to *perform* what he promiſes, though the *promiſe* of ſo great and abundant a reward was mere *goodneſs.*

2. As for the *puniſhing juſtice* of God, about which hath been the great queſtion, whether that be *eſſential* to God or not, it ſeems very plain, that it is not *neceſſary* that God ſhould inflict thoſe judgments which he threatens, *becauſe* he hath threatned them; for there is not the like obligation upon perſons *to perform* their *threatnings*, that there is *to perform their promiſes*; becauſe God by his *promiſe* becomes a *debtor* to thoſe to whom he makes the promiſe; but when he *threatens*, he is the *creditor*, and we are debtors to his juſtice; and as a *creditor*, he may remit the puniſhment which he hath threatened: But then if we conſider God as *loving goodneſs* and *hating ſin*; if we look upon him as *governor of the world*, and concerned to preſerve good order, to encourage holineſs and righteouſneſs, and to diſcountenance ſin, under this conſideration it is *eſſential* to him to *puniſh ſin* at ſuch times, and in ſuch manner and circumſtances, as ſeem beſt to his *wiſdom.*

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by ſome learned men to the contrary, that if *puniſhing juſtice* were *eſſential* to God, then he muſt puniſh the ſinner *immediately*, ſo ſoon as he hath offended, and to the *utmoſt* of his power; becauſe whatever acts *naturally*, acts *neceſſarily*, and to the *utmoſt*: For I do not *ſuppoſe ſuch a juſtice* eſſential to God as acts *neceſſarily*, but *ſuch a juſtice*, which as to the time, and manner, and circumſtances of its acting, is regulated and determined by his *wiſdom*; and there is the ſame reaſon likewiſe of his goodneſs.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the diſpenſations of God in *this* world, and partly from the puniſhments of *the other*.

Firſt, As to the diſpenſations of God in *this* world, there are theſe *two* things objected againſt the *juſtice* of the divine providence.

I. The *inequality* of God's dealings with good and bad men in this world.

II. The *tranſlation* of puniſhments, puniſhing one man's ſin upon another, as the ſins of the fathers upon the children, of the prince upon the people. I begin with the

I. Objection, The *inequality* of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life things happen promiſcuouſly, *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*; if the wicked ſuffer and are afflicted, ſo are the righteous; if the righteous ſometimes flouriſh, ſo do the wicked: And is not this *unjuſt*, that thoſe who are ſo unequal as to their deſerts, ſhould be equally dealt withal? Or if there be any inequality, it is uſually the wrong way; the wicked do, many times, proſper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old againſt the providence of God, which the heathen philoſophers took ſo much pains to anſwer; nay, it did often ſhake the faith of holy and good men in the Old Teſtament: *Job* xii. 6. *The tabernacles of robbers proſper, and they that provoke God are ſecure; into whoſe hand God bringing abundantly*; and *chap.* xxi. 7, 8, 9. he expoſtulates the ſame matter again: And *David* ſays, this was a great ſtumbling-block to him, *Pſal.* lxxiii. 2, 3. and the like we find in the prophets, *Jer.* xii. 1. and *Hab.* i. 13. This objection I have elſewhere conſidered; I ſhall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be ſufficient to break the force of it.

1. It muſt be granted, that it is not neceſſary to *juſtice*, to ſhew itſelf *immediately*, and to diſpenſe rewards and puniſhments ſo ſoon as there are objects for them. This is not thought neceſſary among men; much more ought we to leave it to the wiſdom of God to determine the time and circumſtances of the exerciſing of his juſtice; and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjuſt, if he do not beſtow rewards, and inflict puniſhments, juſt when we think he ſhould.

2. If God intended this life for a ſtate of tryal, wherein he would prove the obedience of men, and their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reaſonable to expect that he ſhould follow men with preſent rewards and puniſhments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, ſo that there would hardly be any opportunity of *trying* them; but, on the contrary, there is all the reaſon in the world to preſume that God ſhould exerciſe the graces and virtues of good men with afflictions and ſufferings, and ſuffer bad men to take their courſe for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them ſo often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men ſhall be judged *according to their works*, then this objection vaniſheth; for that great day will ſet all things ſtraight, which ſeem now to be ſo crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and puniſhments to the moſt convenient ſeaſon, is ſo far from being a reflection upon the *juſtice* of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What *Claudian* ſays of *Ruffinus*, a very bad man, whoſe long impunity had tempted men to call in queſtion the juſtice of God, is conſiderable in this caſe;

> *Abſtulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,*
> *Abſolvitque deos.*

“The puniſhment which overtook him at laſt, did quiet thoſe tumultuous thoughts, “and abſolved the gods from all blame.” When men look but a little way, and conſider only the preſent ſtate of things, they are ready to quarrel at the juſtice of them; but if they would look at the end of things, and have patience to ſtay 'till the laſt, to ſee the concluſion and winding up of things, they would then acquit God in their thoughts from all thoſe imputations of injuſtice which, from the *inequality* of preſent diſpenſations, raſh and inconſiderate men are apt to charge him withal.

II. Objection, From the *tranſlation* of puniſhments, the puniſhing of one man's ſin upon another, as of *the fathers upon the children*, which God threatens in the *ſecond* commandment, and did, in ſome ſort, fulfil in *Ahab*, *in bringing the evil he had threatened him withal, in his ſon's days*, 1 Kings xxi. 29. The puniſhing the ſin of one perſon upon a people, as that of *Achan* upon the whole congregation, *Joſh.* xxii. 20. *Did not Achan the ſon of Zerah commit a treſpaſs in the accurſed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Iſrael? and that man periſhed not alone in his iniquity.* And the ſin of *David* upon the people, 2 *Sam.* xxiv. when *ſeventy thouſand* died of the plague, for *David*'s ſin in numbering the people? Now how is this agreeable to *juſtice?* Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput ſequitur? Miſchief purſues the ſinner?* What can be more reaſonable, *Quam ut peccata ſuos teneant authores? Than that mens faults ſhould be charged upon the authors*, and puniſhment fall upon the guilty?

For anſwer to this,

1. It is not unreaſonable that one man ſhould bear the puniſhment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear to it: *Volenti non fit injuria*; *There is no wrong done to thoſe that are willing to undergo it*, though they be *innocent*; which was the caſe of our bleſſed Saviour ſuffering for us, *the juſt for the unjuſt*, as the ſcripture expreſſeth it.

2. Where the perſon upon whom the puniſhment is transferred, is likewiſe a *ſinner*, and obnoxious to God, there can be no *injuſtice*; becauſe he hath deſerved it upon his own account, and God may take what occaſion he pleaſeth to puniſh them that deſerve to be puniſhed.

3. In puniſhing *the iniquity of the father upon the children*, the guilty perſon, that is, *the father*, is puniſhed in the calamity of *his children*; for a man's *children* are *himſelf multiplied:* and therefore it is very remarkable, that in the *ſecond* commandment, God promiſeth *to ſhew mercy to thouſands of generations of them that love him*; but *he viſits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children* but to *the third and fourth generation*, that is, ſo far as man may live to ſee them puniſhed, and ſuffer in their puniſhment.

4. As to the puniſhment of the *people* for the ſins of their *princes and governors*, and *one part* of a community for *another*, ſuppoſing all of them to be *ſinners*, which is the true caſe, God may lay the puniſhment where he pleaſeth; and there is no more injuſtice than when a man is whipt on the *back* for the theſt which his hand committed, a community being *one body:* Beſides, the *prince* is puniſhed in the loſs of his *people*, the *glory* of a *king* conſiſting in the *multitude* of his *ſubjects*.

The objection with reſpect to the *other* world, the puniſhment of *temporal* evils with *eternal*, is elſewhere anſwered.

The uſe we ſhould make of this whole diſcourſe is,

Firſt, If God be *juſt and righteous*, let us acknowledge it in all his diſpenſations, even in thoſe, the reaſon whereof is moſt hidden and obſcure: *Nehem.* ix. 33. ſpeaking of the great afflictions that had befallen God's own people, yet this he lays down as a firm principle, *Howbeit, thou art juſt in all that is brought upon us.*

Secondly, This is matter of terror to wicked men. God doth *now* exerciſe his *milder* attributes towards ſinners, *his mercy*, and *patience*, and *goodneſs:* but if we deſpiſe theſe, that *terrible* attribute of his *juſtice* will diſplay itſelf; and this the ſcripture deſcribes in a ſevere manner; *The Lord revengeth, and is jealous*; *the Lord will take vengeance on his adverſaries*, and *reſerveth wrath for his enemies.*

Thirdly, This is matter of comfort to good men, that the *righteous* God *governs* the world, and will judge it: *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice*, Pſal. xcvii. 1. and he gives the reaſon of it in the next verſe; *Righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne*, Though he be *omnipotent*, we need not fear; for his *power* is always under the conduct of *eternal righteouſneſs.*

Fourthly, Let us imitate this *righteouſneſs*; let us endeavour *to be righteous as he is righteous*; let us give to God the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is *juſt* and due to men. This duty hath an *immutable* reaſon, founded in the nature of God.

SERMON LXXXVII.

The Truth of God.

DEUT. XXXII. 4.

— *A God of Truth.*

IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall,

I. Shew you what we are to underſtand by the *truth* of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God, that he is *a God of truth*.

III. Anſwer ſome objections that may be made againſt it; and then make ſome *uſe* of it.

I. What we are to underſtand by the *truth* of God. I ſhall take it as the ſcripture uſeth it in a large ſenſe, ſo as to include not only the *veracity* of God, but his *faithfulneſs*. Hence it is that, in ſcripture, *truth* and *faithfulneſs* are ſo often put together, and frequently put one for another: *Iſa.* xxv. 1. *Thy counſels of old are faithfulneſs and truth.* Rev. xxi. 5. *Theſe words are true and faithful.* And the *faithfulneſs* of God in *performing his promiſes*, is frequently called his *truth*. And becauſe the ſcripture uſeth them promiſcuouſly, we need not be very ſollicitous to find out diſtinct notions of them: but if you will, they may be diſtinguiſhed thus: the *truth* or *veracity* of God hath place in *every declaration* of his mind; the faithfulneſs of God, only in his *promiſes*.

For the *firſt*, The *veracity* or *truth* of God; this hath place in *every declaration* of his mind; and ſignifies an exact correſpondence and conformity between his *word* and his *mind*, and conſequently between his *word* and the *truth* and *reality of things*. The correſpondence of his *word* with his *mind*, depends upon *the rectitude* of his *will*; the conformity of his *word* with *the reality of things*, not only upon the *rectitude of his will*, but the *perfection* of his *knowledge*, and the *infallibility* of his *underſtanding*: ſo that when we ſay God is *true*, or *ſpeaks truth*, we mean thus, that his *words* are a plain declaration of his *mind*, and the true repreſentation of *things*, in oppoſition to *falſhood*, which is ſpeaking otherwiſe than the thing is, and *hypocriſy*, that is, ſpeaking otherwiſe than we think. For inſtance; when God declares any thing to be ſo, or not to be ſo, to have been thus, or not to have been thus; the thing really is ſo, and he thinks ſo; when he expreſſeth his deſire of any thing, he does really deſire it; when he commands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it is really his mind and will that we ſhould do what he commands, and avoid what he forbids; when he declares and foretels any thing future, it really ſhall come to paſs, and he really intended it ſhould; if the declaration be to be underſtood abſolutely, it ſhall abſolutely come to paſs; if the declaration be to be underſtood conditionally, it ſhall come to paſs, and he intends it ſhall, if the condition be performed.

Secondly, The *faithfulneſs* of God. This only hath place in his *promiſes*, in which there is an obligation of *juſtice* ſuperadded to his *word*; for God, by his promiſe, doth not only declare what he intends, and what ſhall be; but confers a right upon them to whom the promiſe is made, ſo as that the breach of his promiſe would not only caſt an imputation upon his *truth*, but upon his *juſtice*.

II. That this *perfection* belongs to God. And this I ſhall endeavour to prove,

Firſt, From the dictates of *natural light*.

Secondly, From *ſcripture*.

Firſt, From the dictates of *natural light*. *Natural light* tells us, that *truth* and *faithfulneſs* are *perfections*, and conſequently belong to the divine nature; and that *falſhood* and a *lie* are *imperfections*, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is eſteemed amongſt men a greater contumely and reproach, than *to give a man the lie*, to call him a *liar*, becauſe it is an argument of ſo much baſeneſs, and of a low, and mean, and ſervile ſpirit; the uſual temptation to it being fear of loſing ſome advantage, or incurring ſome danger. Hence was that ſaying, that *it is the property of a ſlave to lie, but of a free man to ſpeak truth:* Now, whatever argues baſeneſs or imperfection, our reaſon tells us is infinitely to be ſeparated from the moſt perfect Being. *God cannot be tempted with evil*, the divine nature being all-ſufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true, and faithful. Men are tempted to *lie* by advantage, and out of fear: but the divine nature hath the ſecurity of its fulneſs and all-ſufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increaſe, nor fear any impairment of its eſtate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either becauſe they are raſh and inconſiderate in paſſing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconſtant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: But none of theſe are incident to God; his infinite wiſdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear fore-ſight of all events, ſecure him both from inconſiderateneſs, and inconſtancy, and forgetfulneſs; and his infinite power renders him able to perform what he hath ſpoken, and to make good his word. And that theſe are the *natural* dictates and ſuggeſtions of our minds, appears clearly from the reaſoning of the heathens in this matter, who were deſtitute of divine revelation. *Plato, de Repub.* lib. 2. lays down this as a certain truth, "That lying and falſhood are "imperfections, and odious to God and men;" Τὸ μὲν ψεῦδος οὐ μόνον ἀπὸ Θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται. And afterwards he tells us, "That the divine nature "is free from all temptations hereto, either from advantage, or fear;" Οὐκ ἄρ' ἐστὶν οὗ ἕνεκα ἂν Θεὸς ψεύδοιτο; πάντη ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον· and concludes, "Therefore "God is true, and deals plainly with us, both in his words and actions, and is neither "changed himſelf, nor deceives us." *Porphyry*, in the life of *Pythagoras*, tells us, "That this was one of his precepts, Μάλιστα δ' ἀληθεύειν; Τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι "τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποιεῖν Θεῷ παραπλησίους·" and afterwards he adds, "That Truth is "ſo great a perfection, that if God would render himſelf viſible to men, he would "chuſe *light for his body, and truth for his ſoul.*"

Secondly, From *ſcripture*. The ſcripture doth very frequently attribute this to God, 2 *Sam.* vii. 28. *And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true.* Pſal. xxv. 10. *All the paths of Lord are mercy and truth.* Pſal. xxxi. 5. *Into thine hand I commit my ſpirit; thou haſt redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.* Rev. iii. 7. *Theſe things ſaith he that is holy, he that is true.* Rev. vi. 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* —— xv. 3. *Juſt and true are thy ways, thou King of ſaints.* —— xvi. 7. *True and righteous are thy judgments.* Hither we may refer thoſe texts which ſpeak of the plenty and abundance of God's truth: *Exod.* xxxiv. 6. *Abundant in goodneſs and truth.* Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. *Plenteous in mercy and truth*; and thoſe which ſpeak of the duration and eternity of it: *Pſal.* c. 5. *And his truth endureth to all generations.* —— cxvii. 2. *And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.* —— cxlvi. 6. *Who keepeth truth for ever.*

As the ſcripture doth attribute this perfection to God, ſo it removes the contrary from him with the greateſt abhorrence and deteſtation: *Numb.* xxiii. 19. *God is not a man, that he ſhould lie, neither the ſon of man, that he ſhould repent: hath he ſaid, and ſhall not he do it? or hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not make it good?* They are *Balaam*'s words, but God put them into his mouth. 1 *Sam.* xv. 29. *The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie, nor repent.* Rom. iii. 4. *Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar.* Nay, the ſcripture goes further; does not only remove lying, and falſhood, and inconſtancy from God, but ſpeaks of theſe as things *impoſſible* to the divine nature: *Tit.* i. 2. *In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promiſed before the world began.* Hebr. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, in which it was impoſſible for God to lie, we might have a ſtrong conſolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope ſet before us.*

And the ſcripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to God, but doth more particularly aſſure us of his *ſincerity*, and *truth*, and *faithfulneſs*. Of his *ſincerity*, that he deals plainly with us, and ſpeaks what he intends, that his wotds are the image of his thoughts, and a true repreſentation of his mind. God is very careful to remove this jealouſy out of the minds of men, who are apt to entertain unworthy thoughts of God, as if notwithſtanding all that he hath declared, he had a ſecret deſign to ruin men; therefore he interpoſeth his oath for our greater aſſurance, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 11. *As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.* When God ſpeaks to us, he ſpeaks his mind, and hath no deſign to circumvent and poſſeſs us with error and deluſion: If he offer life and happineſs, we may believe he is real; and that if he did not intend to beſtow it upon us, or if there were no ſuch thing as a future glory, he would not have declared it to us: this was the temper of our Saviour, who was *the expreſs image of the Father, full of grace and truth.* John xiv. 2. *In my Father's houſe are many manſions; if it were not ſo, I would have told you.*

And as the ſcripture aſſures us of his *ſincerity*, ſo of his *truth* and *faithfulneſs* in the *accompliſhment* of all his *predictions*, and *performances* of all his *promiſes.* As for the truth of his *predictions*, and certain accompliſhment of them, the ſcripture frequently uſeth this proverbial ſpeech, to aſſure us of the certainty of their accompliſhment; *Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away,* Matth. xxiv. 35. For the faithfulneſs of God in his *promiſes*, the ſcripture makes frequent mention of it: *Deut.* vii. 9. *Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy.* Pſal. lxxxix. 33, 34. *I will not ſuffer my faithfulneſs to fail: My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.* The ſcripture doth record God's punctual and full performance of his promiſes, particularly of that promiſe to *Abraham*, after four hundred years, to bring the children of *Iſrael* out of *Egypt*, *and to give them the land of Canaan for an inheritance*, Gen. xv. 13. the punctual accompliſhment you have recorded *Exod.* xii. 41. *And it came to paſs at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the ſelf-ſame day it came to paſs, that all the hoſts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.* See likewiſe *Joſh.* xxi. 44, 45. and xxiii. 14. 1 *Kings* viii. 56. And upon this account it is that God is ſo frequently in ſcripture ſtiled *the God that keepeth covenant*, 1 *Kings* viii. 23. Nehem. i. 5. —— ix. 32. and in ſeveral other places. And ſo likewiſe of *predictions of evil to come*, God is *true* in fulfilling his word, 1 *Sam.* xv. 29. when the prophet had threatened *Saul* to rent the kingdom from him, he adds, *The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie, nor repent; for he is not a man that he ſhould repent.*

III. I come to remove ſome objections that may be made againſt the *truth* and *faithfulneſs* of God.

Firſt, It is objected againſt the *ſincerity* of God, and his *plain dealing*, that he is ſometimes repreſented in ſcripture, as inſpiring prophets with falſe meſſages, 1 *Kings* xxii. 20, &c. *Jer.* iv. 10. —— xx. 7. *Ezek.* xiv. 9.

Anſw. As to *three* of theſe texts, it is a known *hebraiſm* to expreſs things in an *imperative* and *active* form, which are to be underſtood only *permiſſively*. So where *the devils beſought Chriſt, that he would ſuffer them to enter into the herd of ſwine, he ſaid unto them, Go,* Matth. viii. 31. He did not *command*, but *permit* them. And ſo *John* xiii. 27. where our Saviour ſays to *Judas*, *What thou doſt, do quickly*; we are not to underſtand, that he *commanded* him to betray him, though that ſeem to be expreſſed in the form. So likewiſe here, where an *evil ſpirit* offered himſelf to be *a lying ſpirit in the mouth of the prophet*; and God ſays, *Go forth, and do ſo*; this only ſignifies a *permiſſion*, not a *command.* And ſo *Jer.* iv. 10. where the prophet complains that God had greatly deceived the people, *ſaying, they ſhould have peace, when the ſword reacheth to the ſoul*; we are to underſtand this no otherwiſe, but that God *permitted* the falſe prophets to deceive them, propheſying peace to them; as appears by the hiſtory. *Ezek.* xiv. 9. *I the Lord have deceived that prophet*, that is, *permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people*, as a juſt judgment upon them for their infidelity, with reſpect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verſe; *I will take the houſe of Iſrael in their own heart, becauſe they are all eſtranged from me through their idols*; becauſe they have choſen to themſelves falſe gods, I will ſuffer them to be deceived with falſe prophets: And that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, *and I will ſtretch out my hand upon him, and I will deſtroy him from the midſt of my people.* Now God will not puniſh that whereof he is the author.

That text, *Jer.* xx. 7. *Thou haſt deceived me, and I was deceived,* ſignifies no more, but that he had miſtaken the promiſe of God to him, who when he gave him his commiſſion, told him he would be with him, by which he underſtood that no evil ſhould come to him, and *now he was become a deriſion, and the people mocked him*; and in his paſſion and weakneſs he breaks forth into this expreſſion, *Thou haſt deceived me, and I was deceived*; whereas it was his own miſtake of the meaning of God's promiſe, which was not that he ſhould not meet with ſcorn, and oppoſition, and perſecution, but that they ſhould not prevail againſt him, as you may ſee at the latter end of the *firſt* chapter.

Second Objection againſt the *faithfulneſs* of God as to *performance of his promiſe*. It is objected, That God did not give the children of *Iſrael* all the land which he promiſed to *Abraham*; as will appear by comparing *Gen.* xviii. 19, 20. with *Joſh.* xiii. 1, *&c.* and *Judg.* ii. 20, 21. *Gen.* xv. 18. God promiſed to give *Abraham and his ſeed ſuch a land*, the bounds whereof he deſcribes, *Joſh.* xiii. 1. it is ſaid there, that *there remained very much land* yet unconquered, which they had not got the poſſeſſion of. And *Judg.* ii. 20. it is ſaid, that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, God would ſuſpend the further performance of his promiſe, and *would not drive out* any more of the nations before them; and it is probable that the *Iſraelites* never were poſſeſſed of the promiſed land in the full latitude and extent of the promiſe.

Anſw. This covenant of God with *Abraham*, was upon conſideration of his paſt faith and obedience, though it ſeems the full performance of it did likewiſe depend upon the future obedience of his poſterity; in purſuance of this covenant, notwithſtanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that people, God did bring them into the promiſed land, though *they provoked him to deſtroy them many a time*; *becauſe he remembered his covenant with Abraham*: when they were poſſeſſed of it, God gave them a *title* to the reſt, and would have aſſiſted them in the *conqueſt* of it, if they had performed the *condition* required on their part, that is, continued faithful and obedient to him: but they did not, and thereby diſcharged God from any further performance of his promiſe; and God, when he had done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with *Abraham*, ſo far as concerned *his* part, as appears by the acknowledgment of *Joſhua*, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquered, *Joſh.* xxi. 44. and of *Solomon*, 1 *Kings* viii. 56. yea, and had it not been that God had made this covenant, as well upon conſideration of *Abraham*'s faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his poſterity, the rebellions and diſobedience of the people in the wilderneſs had releaſed God wholly from the promiſe; and he had not been unfaithful if *he had deſtroyed utterly that people, and made a full end of them*, and they had *never entered into that land*; becauſe a failure of the *condition* doth make the *obligation* to ceaſe: And that this condition was implied in this covenant with *Abraham*, appears by theſe texts, *Deut.* vii. 12, 13.——xi. 22, 23, 32. and *Judg.* ii, 20, 21. God gives this reaſon why he ſuſpended the compleat performance of his promiſe; *The anger of the Lord was hot againſt Iſrael, and he ſaid, Becauſe that this people hath tranſgreſſed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice, I alſo will not henceforth drive out any from before them, of the nations which Joſhua left when he died.*

Third Objection: God is not punctual in performing his *threatenings*; as when he threatened *Adam*, Gen. ii. 17. *In the day thou eateſt thereof thou ſhalt ſurely die*; which yet was not accompliſhed, for he lived many hundred years after. God threatened *Ahab to bring evil upon him and his family*, 1 Kings xxi. 21. but, upon his humiliation, he is pleaſed to reſpite it, *ver.* 29. So God threatened *Hezekiah* with *death*, but upon his prayer, *adds fifteen years to his life.* 2 Kings xx. Thus *Nineveh* was threatened, but, upon their repentance, *God repented of the evil*, Jonah iii. 10. Now how is this deferring and turning away of judgment conſiſtent with the *truth* of God? Doth not this ſeem to charge him with *falſhood* or *levity?*

Anſw. This may be ſaid in general, That every one that underſtands the nature of God, cannot but be very well aſſured, that *falſhood* and *levity* are very far from God; and though he could not untie ſome particular knots, and anſwer all difficulties, yet he ought to reſt ſatisfied in this aſſurance. I confeſs this objection is trou-

bleſome,

bleſome, and requires a diſtinct conſideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I ſhall, with ſubmiſſion, offer theſe things in anſwer to it:

1. As for the expreſſion of *God's repenting*, we are to underſtand it, as many others in ſcripture, *after the manner of men*, and ſpoken by way of *condeſcenſion* to our weakneſs, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as caſting any imputation of *falſhood* or *inconſtancy* upon God, as if either he did not intend what he ſaith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When God is ſaid to *repent*, the expreſſion only ſignifies thus much, that God *doth not execute* that which *ſeemed* to us to have been his purpoſe, that he is pleaſed to do otherwiſe than his threatenings *ſeemed openly to expreſs*, becauſe of ſome *tacit condition* implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the *truth*, or *ſincerity*, or *conſtancy* of God, in his word. Not from his *truth*; for he ſpeaks what he intends really, if ſomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened; upon which he was reſolved, when he threatened, to be taken off, and ſtop his judgments: Nor doth it derogate from his *ſincerity* and *plainneſs*; for he hath told us that his threatenings have ſuch conditions implied in them: Nor doth it derogate from the *conſtancy* and *immutability* of God, becauſe God doth not *mutare conſilium, ſed ſententiam*; *he doth not change his counſel and purpoſe, but takes off the ſentence* which he had paſſed with reſerved conditions.

2. As to the inſtances, that I may give more particular ſatisfaction to them, I ſhall conſider the threatenings of God with this double reſpect, either with relation to a *law*, or with relation to the *event*; with relation to a *law*, as they are the *ſanction* of it; or with relation to the *event*, as they are *predictions* of ſomething to come.

(1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a *law*, as they are the *ſanction* of it. And thus conſidered, they differ from *promiſes*; for *promiſes* confer a *right*. *Omne promiſſum cadit in debitum*; but a *threatening* doth not convey any *right*, nor, if forborn, can the party complain of *wrong* done to him; and therefore, in this caſe, it can only ſignify what the offence againſt the law deſerves, and what the offender may expect; for the *end* of threatening is not *puniſhment*, but the *avoiding* of it. And this may anſwer the *firſt* inſtance. God gave *Adam a law*; and, by way of *ſanction*, not of *prediction* of an event, he threatened the breach of it with death: Now God did not execute the puniſhment threatened at the time threatened, but deferred it, and this without any impeachment of his *juſtice* or *truth*, becauſe this threatening was only the *ſanction of the law*.

(2.) We may conſider threatenings with relation to the *event*, and as *predictions*; and as to the accompliſhment of theſe, there ſeems to be a greater degree of neceſſity, becauſe the honour of God's *knowledge*, and *power*, and *truth*, ſeem to be concerned in them; for if his word be not fulfilled, it muſt either be for want of knowledge to foreſee events, or power to bring them to paſs, or *conſtancy* to his word. Now if we conſider threatenings with reſpect to the event, as they are predictions of future judgments, I think all the other inſtances may be ſatisfied, by laying down this rule for the underſtanding of them, *viz.* "That all prophetical "threatenings or predictions of judgments are to be underſtood with this *tacit condition*, if there do not intervene the humiliation, and repentance, and prayer of "the perſons againſt whom the judgment is threatened; and if ſo, God may, upon "repentance, without any impeachment of the honour of his *truth*, or *knowledge*, "or *power*, either defer, or abate, or remit the puniſhment." And that the *predictions* of judgments are to be underſtood with this condition, appears clearly from that known text, *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the laſt thing I propoſed, To make ſome *uſe* of this doctrine.

Firſt, If God be *a God of truth*, then this gives us aſſurance that he doth not deceive us, that the faculties which he hath given us are not falſe; but when they have clear perceptions of things, they do not err and miſtake. Were it not for the *veracity* of God, we might, for any thing we know, be under a conſtant deluſion; and no man could demonſtrate the contrary, but that this is our make, and temper, and the very frame of our underſtandings, to be then moſt of all deceived, when we think ourſelves to be moſt certain; I ſay, no man could be aſſured of the contrary, but from hence, becauſe *veracity* and *truth* is a *divine perfection*; and therefore God cannot be the author of error and deluſion. Therefore we may be aſſured, that the frame of our underſtandings is not a cheat, but that our faculties are true, and, unleſs it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are neceſſary to our happineſs.

Secondly, If God be *a God of truth*, then there is reaſon why we ſhould believe and aſſent to whatever we are ſatisfied is revealed to us by God. A divine revelation is a ſufficient ground for the moſt firm aſſent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by God, is the higheſt evidence, and ought to give us the moſt firm aſſurance of the truth of it. Hence it is, that the word of God is called *the word of truth*, yea, and *truth itſelf*, John xvii. 17. *Thy word is truth.*

Therefore whoever entertains the ſcriptures as the word of God, and is ſatisfied of the divine authority of them, ought, in reaſon, to believe every thing contained in them, yea, though there be ſome things of which no reaſonable account can be given, and which our reaſon and underſtanding cannot give us particular ſatisfaction in; yea, becauſe we are ſatisfied that they are revealed by God, *who cannot lie*, whoſe knowledge is infallible, and whoſe word is true, we ought, upon this higher and ſuperior reaſon, to yield a firm aſſent to the truth of them: If we do not, we diſhonour this perfection of God, and rob him of this *eſſential property*, his *veracity*: 1 John v. 10. *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witneſs in himſelf: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, becauſe he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.* As, on the other hand, if we do believe what God hath revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, and ſet our ſeal to his veracity. So it is ſaid of *Abraham*, Rom. iv. 20. that *he was ſtrong in faith, giving glory to God.* And St. *John* the baptiſt, ſpeaking concerning our Saviour, ſaith, *John* iii. 33. *He that hath received his teſtimony, hath ſet to his ſeal, that God is true.*

Thirdly, If God be *a God of truth*, and faithful in performing his promiſe, then here is a firm foundation for our hope and truſt. If God have made any promiſe, we may ſecurely rely upon it, that it ſhall be made good; we may *hold faſt* our hope *without wavering, becauſe he is faithful who hath promiſed*, Hebr. x. 23. Hence it is that the bleſſings of God's covenant are called *ſure mercies*, Iſa. lv. 3.

We attribute much to the word of a faithful friend, and look upon the promiſe of an honeſt man as very good ſecurity; but men may fail us when we rely upon them: but *God is true*, though *all men ſhould prove liars.* Men are fickle and mutable; but the nature of God is fixed, he cannot fail thoſe that truſt in him. When God hath made any promiſe to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulneſs. So we find *David* did, 2 *Sam.* vii. 25, *&c.*

Only we ſhould be careful to perform the *condition* which is required on our part, *Hebr.* iv. 1. we ſhould *take heed, leſt a promiſe being left us, any one ſhould come ſhort of it*, by not performing the *condition*; for *that* doth releaſe and diſcharge him of the promiſe; and *he is faithful*, though he doth not perform what he promiſed, becauſe he did not promiſe, but upon *condition*: And this ſeems to be the meaning of thoſe words, 2 *Tim.* ii. 13. *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himſelf.* He ſaid before, that if we perform the conditions required, God will beſtow the bleſſings promiſed: *It is a faithful ſaying; for if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with him; if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him*: But *if we deny him*, the curſe threatened will then take place, and *he will deny us*; and God is *not unfaithful* in doing this, *he does not deny himſelf.*

Now if we have ſuch aſſurance, we may truſt him with our greateſt concernments, and venture our ſouls with him: *Pſal.* xxxi. 5. *Into thine hand I commit my ſpirit; thou haſt redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.* We ſhould rely upon him, when there are the greateſt improbabilities of the accompliſhment of his promiſes. Thus did *Abraham*, Rom. iv. 17, *&c.*

This ſhould make us alſo *patient in hope*: If a promiſe be not ſpeedily accompliſhed, we ſhould not be dejected, or diſquieted. *David* challengeth himſelf upon this account, *Pſal.* xlii. 11. *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? and why art thou diſquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I ſhall yet praiſe him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* And ſo likewiſe in reference to the rewards of another world, though at a diſtance; yet we ſhould, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *wait for the bleſſed hope.*

Fourthly, The *truth* of God is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may juſtly be expected, becauſe their ſins deſerve them, and there is no *condition* implied in them, upon which thou canſt reaſonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threatened, but of *humiliation* and *repentance:* And if notwithſtanding theſe threatenings, thou continueſt in thy ſins, and *bleſſeſt thyſelf, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart*; by this very thing thou provokeſt the *juſtice* of *God, not to ſpare thee*, and makeſt *his wrath and his jealouſy to ſmoke againſt thee*; and if thou continueſt impenitent, however he may defer the execution of *temporal* evils, his *truth* and *veracity* is concerned to inflict *eternal* puniſhments upon thee; for *he hath ſworn in his wrath*, that ſuch *ſhall not enter into his reſt.*

Fifthly, Let us propound to ourſelves the *truth* of God for our pattern and imitation. Would you be like God? Be *true* and *faithful. Truth* and *faithfulneſs* are *divine perfections*; but *lying* and *falſhood* are the properties of the *devil*, and the predominant qualities of *hell.* The character of the devil, is, that *he abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him: when he ſpeaketh a lie, it is of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it*, John viii. 44.

One of the firſt and moſt natural notions that we have of religion, is, that it is *to imitate God*, and to endeavour to be like him, ſo far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the divine excellencies and perfections, is the higheſt ſin; becauſe it is againſt the cleareſt dictates of our mind, and contrary to thoſe principles which are moſt deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmerciful, falſe and treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt; becauſe theſe ſins are contrary to the chiefeſt and moſt eſſential perfections of God. *Lying* is a ſin that would fly in the face of an heathen, becauſe it directly contradicts thoſe natural notions which every man hath of God and religion; therefore we find that there is hardly any thing that men are more aſhamed of, than *to be taken in a lie*, and it is eſteemed the higheſt reproach to be charged with it; it argues ſuch a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, *the nature of God*, and conſequently ſo much imperfection and baſeneſs; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards God, and baſe towards men.

Upon theſe accounts God expreſſeth himſelf highly offended with thoſe that practiſe *lying* and *falſhood*, and to have a deteſtation of them; *Prov.* xii. 22. *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.* It renders us unlike to him; *Eph.* iv. 24, 25. *Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*, (or, *in the holineſs of truth*). And from hence he infers, *Wherefore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth to his neighbour: for we are members one of another.* Col. iii. 9, 10. *Lie not one to another, ſeeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him*; that is, becauſe we profeſs to be *conformed to the image of God.* More particularly, we ſhould charge ourſelves with *truth* and *faithfulneſs* towards God and men.

1. *Towards God*, in our *oaths*, and *vows*, and *covenants.* In our oaths, when we ſwear in any matter, we tell God that what we ſpeak is truth, and invoke him to bear witneſs to it. To falſify in an *oath*, is one of the moſt ſolemn affronts that we can put upon the God of truth.

And ſo in our *vows*, which are a ſolemn promiſe to God, of ſuch things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth truth, will neither be raſh in making a vow, nor careleſs to perform it; *Eccleſ.* v. 4. *When thou voweſt a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleaſure in fools.* Not to perform what we have vowed, is an argument of folly; either of raſhneſs in the making of it, or of inconſtancy in not keeping it.

So likewiſe in all our *covenants* with God, to ſerve him, and obey him, and keep his commandments, we ſhould ſtrictly charge ourſelves with performance of theſe, There is a natural obligation upon us to theſe things, from the very law of our creation, though we ſhould never ſolemnly make any ſuch promiſe, nor enter into any ſuch engagements, becauſe it is a *tacit* condition of our beings: but the taking of this *covenant* ſolemnly upon us in *baptiſm*, ſtrengthens this obligation, and makes our unfaithfulneſs the greater ſin. All our hopes of happineſs are founded in the faithfulneſs of God; and if thou be falſe to him, how canſt thou expect he ſhould be faithful to thee? It is true, indeed, that *he abides faithful, he cannot deny himſelf*; but if thou haſt any ingenuity in thee, this ſhould be an argument to thee to be faithful to him; I am ſure this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfaithful: for if thou breakeſt the covenant thou haſt entered into, and neglecteſt the conditions upon which God hath ſuſpended the performance of his promiſe, thou diſchargeſt the obligation on his part.

2. *Towards men:* We ſhould charge ourſelves with *truth* in all our *words*, and *faithfulneſs* in all our *promiſes*. It becomes us who worſhip *the God of truth*, to ſpeak truth; to uſe plainneſs and ſincerity in all our words; to abhor falſhood and diſſimulation, and thoſe more refined ways of lying, by equivocation of words, and ſecret reſervations of our minds, on purpoſe to deceive. Thoſe that plead for theſe, it is a ſign they do not underſtand the nature of God, and of religion; which is, to conform ourſelves to the divine perfections. We meet with many complaints, in the Old Teſtament, of the want of truth and faithfulneſs among men: *Pſal.* xii. 1, 2. *Iſa.* lix. 13, 14, 15. *Jer.* vii. 2, 8, 9. ——ii, 4, 5, 6. *Hoſ.* iv. 1. I am afraid there is as much reaſon for this complaint now; for we live in an age of greater *light*, which doth *reprove* and *make manifeſt* this *work of darkneſs*; and methinks their is no ſadder ſign of the decay of chriſtianity, and of the little power and influence that the goſpel hath upon us, than that there is ſo little regard had by chriſtians to theſe *moral* duties; which, becauſe *moral*, (however men may ſlight that word) are therefore of *eternal* and *indiſpenſable* obligation, having their foundation in *the nature of God*.

To conclude all: That man that can diſpenſe with himſelf as to *moral* duties, that makes no conſcience of *telling a lie*, or *breaking his word*; what badge ſoever he may wear, what title ſoever he may call himſelf by, it is as impoſſible that ſuch a man ſhould be *a true chriſtian*, as it is to reconcile *the God of truth* and *the father of lies*.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

The Holineſs of God.

1 PET. I. 16.

Be ye holy, for I am holy.

IN ſpeaking to this attribute, I ſhall,

I. Enquire what we are to underſtand by the *holineſs* of God.

II. Endeavour to ſhew, that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to underſtand by the *holineſs* of God. There is ſome difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for though there be no property more frequently attributed to God, in ſcripture, than this of *holineſs*, yet there is none of all God's attributes, which divines have ſpoken more ſparingly of, than this.

The general notion of *holineſs* is, that it is *a ſeparation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent uſe*. And this notion of *holineſs* is applicable either to *things* or *perſons*. To *things*; thus the veſſels of the tabernacle, and the veſtments of the prieſts, were ſaid to be *holy*, becauſe they were ſeparated from common uſe, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent uſe of the ſervice of God. *Holineſs* of *perſons* is two-fold; either *relative* and *external*, which ſignifies the peculiar relation of a perſon to God; ſuch were called ἱερεῖς, *prieſts*, or *holy men:* or elſe *habitual* and *inherent*; ſuch is the *holineſs* of good men, and it is a *ſeparation from moral imperfection*, that is, from *ſin* and *impurity:* And this is called ὁσιότης, and the primary notion of it is *negative*, and ſignifies the abſence and remotion of ſin. And this appears in thoſe explications which the ſcripture gives of it. Thus it is explained by oppoſition to *ſin* and *impurity*; 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Let us cleanſe ourſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs*; where *holi-*

neſs is oppoſed to *all filthineſs*. Sometimes by the negation of ſin and defilement: So we find *holy, and without blame* put together, *Eph.* i. 4. *Holy and without blemiſh*, Eph. v. 27. *Holy, harmleſs, and undefiled*, Hebr. vii. 26. It is true, indeed, this *negative* notion doth imply ſomething that is *poſitive*; it doth not only ſignify the abſence of ſin, but a contrariety to it: we cannot conceive the abſence of ſin, without the preſence of grace; as, take away crookedneſs from a thing, and it immediately becomes ſtraight. Whenever we are made *holy*, every luſt and corruption in us is ſupplanted by the contrary grace.

Now this *habitual holineſs* of perſons, which conſiſts in *a ſeparation from ſin*, is *a conformity to the holineſs of God*; and by this we may come to underſtand what *holineſs* in God is: And it ſignifies *the peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is ſeparated and removed at an infinite diſtance from moral imperfection, and that which we call ſin*; that is, there is no ſuch thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or tyranny, or injuſtice, or falſhood, or unfaithfulneſs in God; or if there be any other thing that ſignifies ſin and vice, and moral imperfection, *holineſs* ſignifies that the divine nature is at an infinite diſtance from all theſe, and poſſeſſed of the contrary perfections.

Therefore all thoſe texts that remove moral imperfection from God, and declare the repugnancy of it to the divine nature, do ſet forth the *holineſs* of God: *Jam.* i. 13. *God cannot be tempted with evil.* Job viii. 3. *Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert juſtice?* Job xxxiv. 10. 12. *Far be it from God that he ſhould do wickedneſs, and from the Almighty, that he ſhould commit iniquity. Yea, ſurely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Rom. ix. 14. *Is there unrighteouſneſs with God? God forbid.* Zeph. iii. 5. *The juſt Lord is in the midſt thereof, he will not do iniquity.* And ſo falſhood, and unfaithfulneſs, and inconſtancy. *Deut.* xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* 1 Sam. xv. 29. *The ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie.* Tit. i. 2. *In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promiſed.* Heb. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, in which it was impoſſible for God to lie.* Therefore you ſhall find, that *holineſs* is joined with all the *moral perfections* of the divine nature, or put for them: *Hoſ.* xi. 9. *I am the holy One in the midſt of thee*; that is, *the merciful One.* Pſal. cxlv. 17. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* Rom. vii. 12. *The commandment is holy and juſt, and good.* Rev. iii. 7. *Theſe things ſaith he that is holy, he that is true.* Rev. vi 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* Pſaſ. cv. 42. *He remembred his holy promiſe*; *holy*, that is, in reſpect of the *faithfulneſs* of it. Iſa. lv. 3. *The ſure mercies of David*, τὰ ὅσια, *The holy mercies of David*, which will not fail.

So that the *holineſs* of God, is not a *particular*, but an *univerſal* perfection, and runs through all the *moral* perfections of the divine nature; it is the beauty of the divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections: Take away this, and you bring an univerſal ſtain and blemiſh upon the divine nature; without *holineſs*, power would be oppreſſion; and wiſdom, ſubtilty; and ſovereignty, tyranny; and goodneſs, malice and envy; and juſtice, cruelty; and mercy, fooliſh pity; and truth, falſhood. And therefore the ſcripture ſpeaks of this, as God's higheſt excellency and perfection. God is ſaid to be *glorious in holineſs*: Exod. xv. 11. *holineſs* is called *God's throne.* Pſal. xlvii. 8. *He ſitteth upon the throne of his holineſs.* This is that which makes heaven. *Iſa.* lxiii. 15. it is called, *The habitation of his holineſs, and of his glory*; as if this were the very nature of God, and the ſum of his perfections. The *knowledge* of God, is called, *The knowledge of the holy One.* Prov. ix. 10. *To be made partakers of a divine nature*, and *to be made partakers of God's holineſs*, are equivalent expreſſions, 2 Pet. iii. 4 *Hebr.* xii. 10. And becauſe there is no perfection of God greater, therefore he is repreſented as ſwearing by this; *Pſal.* lx. 6. *God hath ſpoken in his holineſs.* Pſal. lxxxix. 35. *Once have I ſworn by my holineſs.* The Angels and glorified ſpirits they ſum up the perfections of God, in this; *Iſa.* vi. 3. *And one cried unto another, and ſaid, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hoſts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* Rev. iv. 8. *And they reſt not day and night, ſaying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* There is no attribute of God ſo often repeated as *this*; in ſome copies it is nine times.

II. I ſhall endeavour to prove, that this perfection belongs to God, *Firſt*, From the light of nature. The philoſophers, in all their diſcourſes of God, agree in this, that whatever ſounds like vice and imperfection, is to be ſeparated from the divine nature; which is to acknowledge his *holineſs*. *Plato*, ſpeaking of our likeneſs to God, ſaith, Ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. *Dan.* iv. 9. King *Nebuchadnezzar* calls God by this title, *I know that the ſpirit of the holy gods is in thee*. In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of God's *moral* perfections, proves his *holineſs*.

Secondly, From ſcripture. There is no title more frequently given to God, in ſcripture, and ſo often ingeminated, as this of his *holineſs*. He is called *holineſs* itſelf, *Iſa.* lxiii. 15. where *heaven* is called *the habitation of his holineſs*, that is, *of God*. His *name* is ſaid to be *holy*, Luke i. 49. *And holy is his name*. He is called the *the only One*, Iſa. xl. 25. *The holy One of Iſrael*, Iſa. xli. 20. *The holy one of Jacob*, *Iſa.* xxix. 23. He is ſaid to be *holy in all his works and promiſes*, Pſal. cv. 42. *In all his ways and works*, Pſal. cxlv. 17. This title is given to each of the three perſons in the bleſſed Trinity; *To God the Father*, in innumerable places: *To God the Son*, Dan. ix. 24. *To anoint the moſt holy*. The devil cannot deny him this title, *Luke* iv. 34. *I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God*. And the Spirit of God hath this title conſtantly given it, *The holy Ghoſt*, or, *the holy Spirit*, or, *The Spirit of holineſs*. The ſcripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to *God*, 1 Sam. ii. 2. *There is none holy as the Lord*. Rev. xv. 4. *For thou only art holy*. *Holineſs* is a communicable perfection; but no creature can partake of it in ſuch a manner and degree as the divine nature poſſeſſeth it. God is eternally holy, the fountain of holineſs; the creatures are derivatively and by participation holy. God is eminently and tranſcendently ſo; the creatures, in a finite degree. God is immutably ſo, it is impoſſible it ſhould be otherwiſe; but no creature is out of an abſolute poſſibility of ſin. In this ſenſe it is ſaid, *Job* iv. 18. that *He putteth no truſt in his ſervants, and his angels he chargeth with folly*. And *chap.* xv. 15. *He putteth no truſt in his ſaints, yea; the heavens are not clean in his ſight*. From all which I ſhall draw theſe inferences:

1. If *holineſs* be a perfection of the divine nature, and a property of God; if, in the notion of God, there be included an everlaſting ſeparation and diſtance from moral imperfection, and eternal repugnance to ſin and iniquity: from hence we may infer, that there is an *intrinſical good and evil* in things; and the reaſons and reſpects of *moral good and evil* do not depend upon any mutable, and inconſtant, and arbitrary principle, but are fixed and immutable, eternal and indiſpenſable. Therefore they do not ſeem to me to ſpeak ſo ſafely, who make the divine *will*, preciſely and abſtractedly conſidered, the *rule* of *moral good and evil*; as if there were nothing good or evil *in its own nature* antecedently to the *will* of God, but that all things are therefore good or evil becauſe God *wills* them to be ſo: For if this were ſo, goodneſs, and righteouſneſs, and truth, and faithfulneſs, would not be eſſential, and neceſſary, and immutable properties of the divine nature, but accidental and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable; which is to ſuppoſe that God, if he pleaſed, might be otherwiſe than good, and juſt, and true. For if theſe depend merely upon the *will* of God, and be not *neceſſary* or *eſſential* properties of the divine nature, then the contrary of theſe, malice, and envy, and unrighteouſneſs, and falſhood do not imply any eſſential repugnancy to the divine nature; which is plainly contrary to what the ſcripture tells us, that *God cannot be tempted with evil*; that *it is impoſſible he ſhould lie*; that he *cannot be unrighteous*.

If any man ſay that God hath now declared himſelf to be juſt, and good, and faithful, and now he cannot be otherwiſe, becauſe *he is a God of truth, and he changeth not*; this is to grant the thing: for this ſuppoſeth the *veracity* and *immutability* of God to be *eſſential* and *neceſſary* perfections of the divine nature; and why not *juſtice* and *goodneſs* as well? I ſay, it ſuppoſeth *veracity* and *immutability* to be *eſſential* perfections, and not to depend upon the *will* of God; that is, that God cannot *will* to be otherwiſe than true and unchangeable: for if he could, what aſſurance can we poſſibly have, but that when he declares himſelf to be good and juſt, he is or may be otherwiſe?

But I need not inſiſt upon this, which ſeems to be ſo very clear, and to carry its own evidence along with it. I will only uſe this argument to prove it, and ſo leave it. No being can *will* its own *nature*, and *eſſential perfections*, that is, chuſe whether it will be thus, or otherwiſe; for that were to ſuppoſe it to be before it is, and before it hath a being, to deliberate about its own nature. Therefore, if this be *the nature* of God, (which, I think no body will deny) to be *good*, and *juſt*, and *true*, and *neceſſarily* to be what he is; then *goodneſs*, and *juſtice*, and *truth* do not depend upon the *will* of God, but there are ſuch things, ſuch notions antecedently to any act of the divine will. And this does no ways prejudice the *liberty* of God; for this is the higheſt perfection, to be *neceſſarily* good, and juſt, and true; and a liberty or poſſibility to be otherwiſe, is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where ſpeaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which it is converſant are indifferent; in all other things it is the higheſt perfection not to be free and indifferent; but immutable and fixed, and neceſſarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodneſs, and juſtice, and truth, ſo that it ſhall not be poſſible to ſwerve from them; and this is the perfection of the *divine nature*, which we call his *holineſs*.

2. If holineſs be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, this ſhews us what account we are to make of ſin, and wickedneſs, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion one to another. Light and darkneſs are oppoſed, as habit and privation; if light be pleaſant and comfortable, then darkneſs is diſmal and horrid. And ſo *holineſs* and *ſin* are oppoſed: If *holineſs* be the higheſt perfection of any nature, then *ſin* is the grand imperfection, and the loweſt debaſement of any being; becauſe it is the moſt oppoſite to *that*, and at the fartheſt diſtance from *that* which is the firſt excellency and perfection.

This ſhould rectify our judgment and eſteem of things and perſons. We admire and eſteem riches, and power, and greatneſs; and we ſcorn and contemn poverty, and weakneſs, and meanneſs, yea, grace and holineſs, if it be in the company of theſe. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, though they be wicked, and *to deſpiſe the poor man's wiſdom* and *holineſs*; but we make a falſe judgment of things and perſons. There is nothing that can be a foundation of reſpect, that ought to command our reverence and eſteem, but real worth, and excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to beſtow our reſpect, and raiſe our eſteem. What St. *James* ſaith of *reſpect of perſons*, I may apply in this caſe, *Jam.* ii. 4. *Are ye not then partial yourſelves, and become judges of evil thoughts?* We are extremely *partial*; we make a falſe judgment, and reaſon ill concerning things, when we admire gilded vices, and weakneſs exalted to high places; I mean, ungodly rich men, and ungodly great men; for wicked men are properly ungodly, unlike to God, and when we contemn poor, and mean, and afflicted holineſs and piety. Were but our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprejudiced, we ſhould ſee a beauty and reſplendency in goodneſs; even when it is under the greateſt diſadvantage, when it is cloathed with rags, and ſits upon a dung-hill, it would ſhine through all theſe miſts, and we ſhould ſee a native light and beauty in it, through the darkneſs of a poor and low condition: And we ſhould ſee wickedneſs to be a moſt vile and abject thing when it appears in all its gallantry and bravery; we ſhould look upon the poor *righteous* man, as *more excellent than his neighbour*; and the profane gallant, as the *off-ſcouring of the earth*. We ſhould value a man that *does juſtice, and loves mercy, and ſpeaks the truth to his neighbour*; we ſhould eſteem any one more upon the account of any one of theſe ſimple qualities, than we would another man deſtitute of theſe, upon the account of an hundred titles of honour, and ten thouſand acres of land. A wicked and unholy man, he is *a vile perſon*, who deſerves *to be contemned*; and an *holy* man, he is *the right honourable*; Pſal. xv. 4. *In whoſe eyes a vile perſon is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.* The *vile perſon* is oppoſed to him that *fears the Lord*. He that is bold to affront God, and ſin againſt him, is the *baſe* and *ignoble* perſon. God himſelf, who is poſſeſſed of all excellency and perfection, and therefore knows beſt how to judge of theſe, he tells us how we ſhould value ourſelves and others; *Jer.* ix. 23, 24. *Let not the wiſe man glory in his wiſdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he underſtandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exerciſe loving-kindneſs, judgment, and righteouſneſs in the*

the earth; *for in theſe things I delight*, *ſaith the Lord.* To *know* theſe divine qualities and pefections, ſignifies here, to underſtand them ſo as to imitate them. I do not ſpeak this, to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to leſſen the reſpect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued but wickedneſs and vice; and I would have thoſe who have ſtore of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add *religion* to their *riches*, and *holineſs* to their *honour*, that they may be current for their *intrinſick* value, rather than for the *image* and *picture* of worth which the world hath ſtamped upon them.

3. If *holineſs* be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then what an abſurd and unreaſonable thing is it, to ſcorn and deſpiſe *holineſs*, to mock and deride men under this very title! The world is much blinded, that they do not ſee the great *evil* of *ſin*, and the *beauty* and *excellency* of *holineſs*: but that men ſhould be ſo infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to miſtake things of ſo vaſt difference, as *ſin*, and *holineſs*; to *call good evil, and evil good*; that *ſin*, which is the vileſt thing in the world, ſhould be eſteemed and cheriſhed, accounted a piece of gallantry, and reckoned amongſt the excellencies and accompliſhments of human nature; and *holineſs*; which is ſo great a perfection, ſhould be a name of hatred and diſgrace, to be contemned and perſecuted; that that which is the glory of heaven, and the moſt radiant perfection of the divine nature, ſhould be matter of ſcorn and contempt; as the apoſtle ſpeaks in another caſe, *Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder, and periſh!* Do ye think the holy and juſt God will put up theſe affronts and indignities? Ye do not only deſpiſe *men*, but ye deſpiſe God alſo: You cannot contemn that which God accounts *his glory*, without reviling the divine nature, and offering deſpite to God himſelf: The malice reacheth heaven, and is levelled againſt God, whenever ye ſlight *holineſs*.

4. If God be a *holy* God, and hath ſuch a repugnancy in his nature to ſin, then this is matter of terror to wicked men. The *holy* God cannot but hate ſin, and be an enemy to wickedneſs; and the hatred of God is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great man; becauſe where hatred is backed with power, the effects of it are terrible: but the hatred of the almighty and eternal God is much more dreadful; becauſe the effects of it are greater, and more laſting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmoſt they can do; *they can but kill the body*; *after that, they have no more that they can do*: they cannot hurt our ſouls; they cannot follow us beyond the grave, and purſue us into another world: but the effects of God's hatred and diſpleaſure are mighty and laſting, they extend themſelves to all eternity; for who knoweth the power of his anger? Who can tell the utmoſt of what omnipotent Juſtice can do to ſinners? *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; becauſe he that *lives for ever*, can *puniſh for ever*. We are miſerable, if God do not love us. Thoſe words, *My ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him*, ſignify great miſery, and expreſs a dreadful curſe: but it is a more poſitive expreſſion of miſery, for God *to hate us*; that ſignifies ruin and deſtruction to the utmoſt; *Pſal.* v. 4. *Thou art not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with thee.* This is a μείωσις, and expreſſeth leſs than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards ſin and wickedneſs: therefore the pſalmiſt adds, *Thou hateſt all the workers of iniquity*; and then, in the next verſe, to ſhew what is the effect of God's hatred, *Thou ſhalt deſtroy them that ſpeak leaſing*. Therefore, ſinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God's *holineſs*.

5. Imitate the *holineſs* of God: This is the inference here in the text, *Be ye holy, for I am holy. Holineſs*, in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of God: And when it is ſaid, *Be ye holy*; it is as much as if he had ſaid, Be ye good, and patient, and merciful, and true, and faithful; for I am ſo. Therefore religion is called *the knowledge of the holy One*, Prov. ix. 10. and *chap.* xxx. 3. And our imitation of God, is expreſſed by our *putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteoſneſs and true holineſs*, Eph. iv. 24. Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of God, and the ſum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like God, let us conform ourſelves to the *holy* God; endeavour to be *habitually holy*, which is our conformity to the *nature* of God; and *actually holy*, which is our conformity to the *will* of God. I will not enlarge upon this, becauſe I have preſſed the imitation of theſe particular

perfections, goodneſs, patience, juſtice, truth, and faithfulneſs, upon other texts. I ſhall only mention *two* arguments to excite and quicken our deſires and endeavour after *holineſs*.

1. *Holineſs* is an imitation of the *higheſt* excellency and perfection. *Holineſs*, I told you, ſignifies a ſeparation from ſin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and, conſequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the divine nature, the goodneſs, and mercy, and patience, and juſtice, and veracity, and faithfulneſs of God; now theſe are the very *beauty* and *glory* of the divine nature. The firſt thing that we attribute to God, next to his *being*, is his *goodneſs*, and thoſe other *attributes* which have a neceſſary connection with it; for his *greatneſs* and *majeſty* is nothing elſe but the *glory* which reſults from his *united perfections*, eſpecially from his *goodneſs*, and thoſe perfections which are akin to it. Separate from God theſe perfections which holineſs includes in it, and what would be left but an *omnipotent evil*, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do miſchief? Which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impoſſible a thing, as can be imagined: ſo that if we have any ſparks of ambition in us, we cannot but aſpire after *holineſs*, which is ſo great an excellency and perfection of God himſelf. There is a vulgar prejudice againſt *holineſs*, as if it were a poor, mean thing, and below a great and generous ſpirit; whereas *holineſs* is the only true greatneſs of mind, the moſt genuine nobility, and the higheſt gallantry of ſpirit; and however it be deſpiſed by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and divine original. *Holineſs* is the firſt part of the character of *the wiſdom that is from above*; Jam. iii. 17. *The wiſdom that is from above, is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy.*

2. *Holineſs* is an *eſſential and principal ingredient of happineſs*. *Holineſs* is a ſtate of peace and tranquillity, and the very frame and temper of *happineſs*; and without it, the divine nature, as it would be imperfect, ſo it would be miſerable. If the divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injuſtice, or unfaithfulneſs, it would be liable to vexation and diſcontent, than which nothing can be a greater diſturbance of *happineſs*: ſo that *holineſs* is neceſſary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the *happineſs* of the next life, but to our preſent peace and contentment. If reaſonable creatures could be happy, as brute beaſts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and following the dictates of ſenſe and fancy, God would not have bound us up to a *law* and *rule*, but have left us, as he hath done unreaſonable creatures, to ſatisfy our luſts and appetites, without check and controul: but angels and men, which are reaſonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of comelineſs and filthineſs, ſo woven and twiſted in their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impoſſible that ſuch creatures ſhould be happy otherwiſe, than by complying with theſe notions, and obeying the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go againſt, they will naturally feel remorſe and torment in their own ſpirits; their minds will be uneaſy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and diſpleaſed with themſelves for what they have done. So the apoſtle tells us, *Rom.* i. that even the moſt degenerate heathens had *conſciences*, which did *accuſe*, or *excuſe them*, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. God, therefore, who *knows our frame*, hath ſo adapted his *law* to us, which is *the rule of holineſs*, that if we live up to it, we ſhall avoid the unſpeakable torment of a guilty conſcience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we ſhall always be at diſcord with ourſelves, and in a perpetual diſquiet of mind: for nothing can do contrary to *the law of its being*, that is, *to its own nature*, without diſpleaſure and reluctancy; the conſequence of which, in *moral* actions, is *guilt*; which is nothing elſe but the trouble and diſquiet which ariſeth in one's mind, from conſciouſneſs of having done ſomething that contradicts the perfective principle of his being, that is, ſomething which did not become him, and which, being what he is, that is *a reaſonable creature*, he ought not to do.

So that in all *reaſonable* creatures there is a certain kind of *temper* and *diſpoſition* that is *neceſſary* and *eſſential* to *happineſs*, and that is *holineſs*; which, as it is the *perfection*, ſo it is the great *felicity* of the divine nature: And, on the contrary, this is one chief part of the miſery of thoſe wicked and accurſed ſpirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to God, they are envious, and malicious, and wicked; that is, of ſuch a temper as is naturally a torment and diſquiet to itſelf: And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil diſpoſition of our ſpirits; and 'till *that* be cured, which can only be done by *holineſs*, it is as impoſſible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himſelf, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe; and the external preſence of God, and a local heaven, would ſignify no more to make a wicked man happy and contented, than heaps of gold, and concerts of muſick, and a well ſpread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's eaſe in the paroxyſms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the ſtone. If a ſenſual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like *the rich man in hell*, he would be *tormented* with a continual *thirſt*, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent deſires, and would not meet with the leaſt *drop* of ſuitable pleaſure and delight to *quench* and *allay* the heat: the reaſon is, becauſe ſuch a man hath *that* within him, which torments him, and he cannot be at eaſe 'till *that* be removed. *Sin* is the violent, and unnatural, and uneaſy ſtate of our ſoul; every wicked man's ſpirit is out of order, and 'till the man be put into a right frame by *holineſs*, he will be perpetually diſquieted, and can have no reſt within himſelf. The prophet fitly deſcribes the condition of ſuch a perſon, *Iſai.* lvii. 20, 21. *But the wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt forth mire and dirt: There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* So long as a man is unholy, ſo long as filthineſs and corruption abound in his heart, they will be reſtleſly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, 'till it have purged itſelf of its dregs and foulneſs. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the ſpirit of a wicked man; it is like the *ſea*, when it roars and rages through the ſtrength of contrary winds; it is the ſcene of furious luſts, and wild paſſions, which as they are contrary to holineſs, ſo they maintain perpetual conteſts and feuds among themſelves.

All ſin ſeparates us from God, who is the foundation of our happineſs. Our limited nature, and the narrowneſs of our beings, will not permit us to be happy in ourſelves: It is peculiar to God to be his own happineſs; but man, becauſe he is finite, and therefore cannot be ſelf-ſufficient, is carried forth by an innate deſire of happineſs, to ſeek his felicity in God. So that there is in the nature of man a ſpring of reſtleſs motion, which, with great impatience, forceth him out of himſelf, and toſſes him to and fro, 'till he comes to reſt in ſomething that is ſelf-ſufficient. Our ſouls, when they are ſeparated from God, like *the unclean ſpirit* in the goſpel, when it was *caſt out*, *wander up and down in dry and deſert places*, *ſeeking reſt*, *but finding none.* Were the whole world calm about a man, and did it not make the leaſt attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of divine vengeance, yet he could not be ſatisfied with himſelf; there is ſomething within him that would not let him be at reſt, but would tear him from his own foundation and conſiſtency; ſo that when we are once broken off from God, the ſenſe of inward want doth ſtimulate and force us to ſeek our contentment elſewhere. So that nothing but *holineſs*, which re-unites us to God, and reſtores our ſouls to their primitive and original ſtate, can make us *happy*, and give peace and reſt to our ſouls: And this is the conſtant voice and language of Scripture, and the tenour of the Bible; *Acquaint now thyſelf with him, and be at peace*, Job xxii. 21. *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart*, Pſal. xcvii. 11. *The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever*, Iſa. xxxii. 17.

Seeing then *holineſs* is ſo *high a perfection*, and ſo *great a happineſs*, let theſe arguments prevail with us to aſpire after this temper, that *as he who hath called us, is holy, ſo we may be holy in all manner of converſation; becauſe it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.*

ADVER-

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following ſermon was placed here, before the reſt of the ſermons on the *attributes*, to make up the ſixth volume in *octavo*; and is continued here ſtill, on account of the *table*.

SERMON LXXXIX.

Of doing Good.

[A Spital Sermon, preached at *Chriſt-Church* on *Eaſter-Tueſday*, April 14. 1691.]

GALAT. VI. 9, 10.

Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not: As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, eſpecially unto them who are of the houſhold of faith.

THE apoſtle, in theſe words, recommends unto us a great and comprehenſive duty, *the doing of good*; concerning which, the text offers theſe *five* particulars to our conſideration:

I. The nature of the duty itſelf, which is called *well-doing*, ver. 9. and *doing good*, ver. 10.

II. The extent of this duty in reſpect of its object, which is all mankind; *Let us do good unto all men, eſpecially unto them who are of the houſhold of faith.*

III. The meaſure of it, *As we have opportunity.*

IV. Our unwearied perſeverance in it; *Let us not be weary in well doing.*

V. The argument and encouragement to it; becauſe *in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not: Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good,* &c.

I. I will conſider the nature of the duty itſelf of *well-doing*, and *doing good*. And this I ſhall explain to you as briefly as I can, by conſidering the extent of the act of doing good, and the excellency of it. And,

1. The extent of the act. It comprehends in it all thoſe ways wherein we may be beneficial and uſeful to one another. It reaches not only to the bodies of men, but to their ſouls, that better and more excellent part of ourſelves, and is converſant in all thoſe ways and kinds whereby we may ſerve the temporal or ſpiritual good of our neighbour, and promote either his preſent, or his future and eternal happineſs.

To inſtruct the ignorant, or reduce thoſe that are in error; *to turn the diſobedient to the wiſdom of the juſt*, and reclaim thoſe that are engaged in any evil courſe, by good counſel, and ſeaſonable admonition, and by prudent and kind reproof; to reſolve and ſatisfy the doubting mind; to confirm the weak; to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort the melancholy and troubled ſpirits: Theſe are the nobleſt ways of charity, becauſe they are converſant about the ſouls of men, and tend to procure and promote their eternal felicity.

And then *to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, releaſe the impriſoned*; to redeem the captives, and to vindicate thoſe who are injured and oppreſſed in their perſons, or eſtates, or reputation; to repair thoſe who are ruined in their fortunes; and, in a word, to relieve and comfort thoſe who are in any kind of calamity or diſtreſs:

All theſe are but the ſeveral branches and inſtances of this great duty here in the text, of *doing good*; though it hath, in this place, a more particular reſpect to the charitable ſupply of thoſe who are in want and neceſſity; and therefore, with a more particular regard to that, I ſhall diſcourſe of it at this time. You ſee the extent of the duty: We will, in the

2d place, Briefly ſay ſomething of the excellency of it; which will appear, if we conſider, that it is the imitation of the higheſt excellency and perfection. To *do good*, is to be like God, who *is good, and doth good*; and it is to be like to him in that which he eſteems his greateſt glory: It is to be like the Son of God, who, when he was pleaſed to take our nature upon him, and live here below, and to dwell amongſt us, *went about doing good.* And it is to be like the bleſſed angels, the higheſt rank and order of God's creatures, whoſe great employment it is to be *miniſtring ſpirits, for the good of men.* So that, for a man to be kind, and helpful, and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a ſaviour, and a kind of God too.

It is an argument of a great, and noble, and generous mind, to extend our thoughts and cares to the concernments of others, and to employ our intereſt, and power, and endeavours for their benefit and advantage; whereas a low, and mean, and narrow ſpirit is contracted and ſhrivelled up within itſelf, and cares only for its own things, without any regard to the good and happineſs of others.

It is the moſt noble work in the world; becauſe that inclination of mind, which prompts us to do good, is the very temper and diſpoſition of *happineſs. Solomon*, after all his experience of worldly greatneſs and pleaſure, at laſt pitched upon this, as the great felicity of human life, and the only good uſe that is to be made of a proſperous and plentiful fortune: *Eccleſ.* iii. 12. *I know* (ſays he, ſpeaking of riches) *that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and to do good in his life.* And, certainly, the beſt way to take joy in an eſtate, is to do good with it: And a greater and wiſer than *Solomon* has ſaid it, even he *who is the power and wiſdom of God*, has ſaid it, that *it is a more bleſſed thing to give than to receive.*

Conſider further, that this is one of the great and ſubſtantial parts of religion, and next to the love and honour which we pay to Almighty God, the moſt acceptable ſervice that we can do to him; it is one table of the law, and next to the *firſt and great commandment of loving the Lord our God*, and very like to it: *And the ſecond is like unto it*, (ſays our Saviour) *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf*; like to it, in the excellency of it; and equal to it, in the neceſſary obligation of it. *And this commandment* (ſays St. *John*, 1 epiſt. chap. iv. ver. 21.) *have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo.* The firſt commandment, indeed, excels in the dignity of the object, becauſe it enjoins the love of God; but the ſecond ſeems to have the advantage in the reality of its effects: for the love of God conſiſts in our acknowledgment, and honour of him; but our *righteouſneſs and goodneſs extend not to him*; we can do him no real benefit and advantage: but our love to men is really uſeful and beneficial to them: for which reaſon God is contented, in many caſes, that the external honour and worſhip which he requires of us by his poſitive commands, ſhould give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another: *I will have mercy*, (ſays God, in the prophet *Amos) and not ſacrifice.*

And to ſhew how great a value God puts upon this duty, he hath made it the very teſtimony of our love to himſelf; and for want of it, hath declared that he will reject all our other profeſſions and teſtimonies of love to him, as falſe and inſincere. *Whoſo hath this world's good*, (ſaith St. *John*, 1 epiſt. chap. iii. ver. 17.) *and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* And again, *chap.* iv. *ver.* 20. *If a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath not ſeen?*

You ſee the duty here recommended, both in the extent, and in the excellency of it; *Let us do good.* I proceed to conſider, in the

IId place, The extent of this duty, in reſpect of its object, which is all mankind, but more-eſpecially chriſtians, thoſe that are of the ſame faith and religion; *Let us do good unto all men, eſpecially unto thoſe that are of the houſhold of faith.*

So that the object, about which this duty is converſant, is very large. and takes in all mankind; *let us do good unto all men.* The *Jews* confined their love and kindneſs to their own kindred and nation; and becauſe they were prohibited familiarity with idolatrous nations, and were enjoined to maintain a perpetual enmity with *Amalek*, and the ſeven nations of *Canaan*, whom God had caſt out before them, and devoted to ruin, they looked upon themſelves as perfectly diſcharged from all obligation of kindneſs to the reſt of mankind: And yet it is certain, that they were expreſly enjoined by their law, to be kind to ſtrangers, becauſe they themſelves had been ſtrangers in the land of *Egypt*. But our Saviour hath reſtored this law of love and charity to its natural and original extent; and hath declared every one that is of the ſame nature with ourſelves, to be our *neighbour* and our *brother*, and that he is to be treated by us accordingly, whenever he ſtands in need of our kindneſs and help; and to ſhew that none are out of the compaſs of our charity, he hath expreſly commanded us to extend it to thoſe who, of all others, can leaſt pretend to it, even our *enemies* and *perſecutors*.

So that if the queſtion be about the extent of our charity in general, theſe *two* things are plainly enjoined by the chriſtian religion:

1. Negatively, That we ſhould not hate, nor bear ill-will to any man, nor do him any harm or miſchief. *Love worketh no evil to his neighbour*, (ſaith the apoſtle) *Rom.* xiii. 10. And this negative charity every man may exerciſe towards all men, without exception, and that equally; becauſe it does not ſignify any poſitive act, but only that we abſtain from enmity and hatred, from injury and revenge, which it is in every man's power, by the grace of God, and the due care and government of himſelf, to do.

2. Poſitively, The law of charity requires, that we ſhould bear an univerſal good-will to all men, and wiſh every man's happineſs, and pray for it, as ſincerely as we wiſh and pray for our own; and if we be ſincere in our wiſhes and prayers for the good of others, we ſhall be ſo in our endeavours to procure and promote it.

But the great difficulty is, as to the exerciſe of our charity, and the real expreſſions and effects of it, in doing good to others; which is the duty here meant in the text, and (as told you before) does more particularly relate to the relief of thoſe who are in want and neceſſity. And the reaſon of the difficulty is, becauſe no man can do good to all in this kind, if he would; it not being poſſible for any man to come to the knowledge of every man's neceſſity and diſtreſs; and if he could, no man's ability can poſſibly reach to the ſupply and the relief of all mens wants. And, indeed, this limitation the text gives to this duty; *As we have opportunity* (ſays the apoſtle) *let us do good unto all men*; which either ſignifies, as occaſion is offered, or as we have ability of doing, or both; as I ſhall ſhew afterwards.

So that it being impoſſible to exerciſe this charity to all men that ſtand in need of it, it is neceſſary to make a difference, and to uſe prudence and diſcretion in the choice of the moſt fit and proper objects. We do not know the wants of all men, and therefore the bounds of our knowledge do of neceſſity limit our charity within a certain compaſs; and of thoſe whom we do know, we can relieve but a ſmall part, for want of ability: from whence it follows, that though a man were never ſo charitably diſpoſed, yet he muſt of neceſſity ſet ſome rules to himſelf, for the management of his charity to the beſt advantage. What thoſe rules are, cannot minutely and nicely be determined: When all is done, much muſt be left to every man's prudence and diſcretion, upon a full view and conſideration of the caſe before him, and all the circumſtances of it; but yet ſuch general rules may be given, as may ſerve for the direction of our practice in moſt caſes; and for the reſt, every man's prudence, as well as it can, muſt determine the matter. And the rules which I ſhall give, ſhall be theſe:

Firſt, Caſes of extremity ought to take the firſt place, and do for that time challenge precedence of all other conſiderations. If a perſon be in great and preſent diſtreſs, and his neceſſity ſo urgent, that, if he be not immediately relieved, he muſt periſh; this is ſo violent a caſe, and calls ſo loud for preſent help, that there is no reſiſting of it, whatever the perſon be; though a perfect ſtranger to us, though moſt unworthy, though the greateſt enemy we have in the world, yet the greatneſs of his diſtreſs does ſo ſtrongly plead for him, as to ſilence all conſiderations to the contrary; for, after all, he is a *man*, and is of the ſame nature with ourſelves; and the conſideration of *humanity* ought, for that time, to prevail over all objections againſt the man, and to prefer him to our charity, before the neareſt relation and friend, who is not in the like extremity. In other caſes, we not only may, but ought to relieve our friends, and thoſe that have deſerved well of us, in the firſt place: but if our enemy be in extremity, then that divine precept takes place, *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirſt, give him drink.*

Secondly, In the next place, I think, that the obligation of nature, and the nearneſs of relation, does challenge a preference; for there is all the reaſon in the world, if other things be equal, that we ſhould conſider and ſupply the neceſſity of thoſe who are of our blood and kindred, and members of our family, before the neceſſity of ſtrangers, and thoſe who have no relation to us. There is a ſpecial duty incumbent upon us, and another obligation beſide that of charity, to have a particular care and regard for them. In this caſe, not only chriſtianity, but nature, ties this duty upon us: 1 *Tim.* v. 8. *If any man provide not for his own, eſpecially for thoſe of his own houſe*, for them that are of his family, *he hath denied the faith, and is worſe than an infidel*; that is, he doth not only offend againſt the law of chriſtianity, but againſt the very dictates of nature, which prevail even amongſt infidels. And our Saviour hath told us, that when our parents ſtand in need of relief, it is more acceptable to God, to employ our eſtates that way, than to devote them to him, and his immediate ſervice; and that it is a kind ſacrilege to conſecrate that to God, whereby our parents may be profited, and provided for in their neceſſity.

Thirdly, The obligation of kindneſs, and benefits, lays the next claim to our charity. If they fall into want, who have obliged us by their former kindneſs and charity, both juſtice and charity do challenge from us a particular conſideration of their caſe; and proportionably, if we ourſelves have been obliged to their family, or to any other that are nearly related to them.

Fourthly, Thoſe *who are of the houſhold of faith*, and of the ſame religion, and members of the ſame myſtical body, and do partake of the ſame holy myſteries the body and blood of our bleſſed Saviour, the ſtricteſt bond of love and charity; theſe fall under a very particular conſideration in the exerciſe of our charity: And of this the apoſtle puts us in mind, in the laſt words of my text, *Let us do good unto all men, eſpecially unto thoſe that are of the houſhold of faith.* God hath a ſpecial love and regard for ſuch; and thoſe whom God loves, ought to be very dear to us.

And this, perhaps, was a conſideration of the firſt rank, in thoſe times when chriſtians lived among heathens, and were expoſed to continual wants and ſufferings: but it ſignifies much leſs now, that chriſtianity is the general profeſſion of a nation, and is too often made uſe of to very uncharitable purpoſes; to confine mens bounty and benefits to their own ſect and party, as if they, and none but they, were *the houſhold of faith*; a principle, which I know not whether it hath more of *judaiſm* or of *popery* in it.

Fifthly, After theſe, the merit of the perſons who are the objects of our charity, and all the circumſtances belonging to them, are to be valued and conſidered, and we are accordingly to proportion our charity, and the degrees of it. I ſhall inſtance in ſome particulars, by which a prudent man may judge of the reſt.

Thoſe who labour in an honeſt calling, but yet are oppreſſed with their charge, or diſabled, for a time, by ſickneſs, or ſome other caſualty; theſe, many a time, need as much, and certainly deſerve much better, than common beggars; for theſe are uſeful members of the common-wealth; and we cannot place our charity better, than upon theſe, who do what they can to ſupport themſelves.

Thoſe likewiſe who are fallen from a rich and plentiful condition, without any fault or prodigality of their own, merely by the providence of God, or ſome general calamity; theſe are more-eſpecially objects of our charity, and liberal relief.

And thoſe alſo who have been charitable, and have liberally relieved others, when they were in condition to do it; or the children, or near relations of thoſe who were eminently charitable and beneficial to mankind, do deſerve a particular regard in our charity. Mankind being (as I may ſay) bound in juſtice, and for the honour of God's providence, to make good his promiſe, to preſerve ſuch from extreme neceſſity.

And, *Laſtly*, Thoſe, whoſe viſible wants, and great age and infirmities, do plead for more than ordinary pity, and do, at firſt ſight, convince every one that ſees them, that they do not beg out of lazineſs, but of neceſſity, and becauſe they are not able to do any thing towards their own ſupport and ſubſiſtence.

There are innumerable circumſtances more, which it would be endleſs to reckon up; but theſe which I have mentioned are ſome of the chief; and by proportion to theſe, we may direct ourſelves in other caſes.

Sixthly, Thoſe whom we certainly know to be true objects of charity, are to be conſidered by us, before thoſe who are ſtrangers to us, and whoſe condition we do not know, yea though, in common charity, we do not diſbelieve them; becauſe, in reaſon and prudence, we are obliged to prefer thoſe who are certainly known to us; ſince we find by experience, that there are many cheats and counterfeit beggars, who can tell a fair ſtory, and carry about teſtimonials of their own making; and likewiſe becauſe we run the hazard of miſplacing our charity, when there are objects enough beſides, where we are ſure we ſhall place it right: and charity miſplaced, as it is in truth and reality no charity in itſelf, ſo it is hardly any in us, when we ſquander it ſo imprudently, as to paſs by a certain and real object, and give it thoſe of whom we are not certain that they are true objects of charity. In this blind way a man *may give all his goods to the poor*, as he thinks, and yet do no real charity. And therefore, unleſs we be able to relieve *every one that aſks*, we muſt of neceſſity make a difference, and uſe our beſt prudence in the choice of the moſt proper objects of our charity.

And yet we ought not to obſerve this rule ſo ſtrictly, as to ſhut out all whom we do not know, without exception: becauſe their caſe, if it be true, may ſometimes be much more pitiable, and of greater extremity, than the caſe of many whom we do know; and then it would be uncharitable to reject ſuch, and to harden our hearts ſo far againſt them as utterly to diſbelieve them; becauſe it is no fault of theirs, that we do not know them; their wants may be real, notwithſtanding that; eſpecially when their extremity ſeems great, we ought not to ſtand upon too rigorous a proof and evidence of it, but ſhould accept of a fair probability.

Seventhly, Thoſe who ſuffer for the cauſe of religion, and are ſtripped of all for the ſake of it, ought to have a great precedence in our charity to moſt other caſes. And this of late hath been, and ſtill is the caſe of many among us, who have fled hither for refuge, from the tyranny and cruelty of their perſecutors, and have been, by a moſt extraordinary charity of the whole nation, more than once extended to them, moſt ſeaſonably relieved; but eſpecially by the bounty of this great city, whoſe liberality, upon theſe occaſions, hath been beyond all example, and even all belief. And I have often thought, that this very thing, next to the mercy and goodneſs of Almighty God, hath had a particular influence upon our preſervation and deliverance from the terrible calamities which were juſt ready to break in upon us; and, were we not ſo ſtupidly inſenſible of this great deliverance which God hath wrought for us, and ſo horribly unthankful to him, and to the happy inſtruments of it, might ſtill be a means to continue the favour of God to us. And what cauſe have we to thank God, who hath allotted to us this *more bleſſed*, and more merciful part, *to give*, and not *to receive*; to be free from perſecution ourſelves, that we might give refuge and relief to thoſe that are perſecuted!

III. We muſt conſider the meaſure of our charity, ὁ καιρὸν ἔχομεν, which our tranſlation renders, *as we have opportunity*; others, *as we have ability*: So that this expreſſion may refer either to the occaſions of our charity, or to the ſeaſon of it, or to the proportion and degree of it.

1. It may refer to the occaſions of our charity, *as we have opportunity, let us do good*, that is, according as the occaſions of doing good ſhall preſent themſelves to us, ſo often as an opportunity is offered. And this is an argument of a very good and charitable diſpoſition, gladly to lay hold of the occaſions of doing good, as it were to meet opportunities when they are coming towards us. This forwardneſs of mind in the work of charity, the apoſtle commends in the *Corinthians*, 2 Cor. ix. 2. *I know the forwardneſs of your mind, for which I boaſt of you to them of Macedonia:* And this he requires of all chriſtians, *Tit.* iii. 8. that they ſhould

be ready to do every good work; and 1 *Tim.* vi. 18. that we be *ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate.* Some are very ready to decline theſe opportunities, and to get out of the way of them; and when they thruſt themſelves upon them, and they cannot avoid them, they do what they do *grudgingly*, and not *with a willing mind.*

2. It may refer to the ſeaſon of this duty, ὡς καιρὸν χομεν, *whilſt we have time*; ὡς for ἕως, *whilſt this life laſts*; ſo *Grotius* does underſtand and interpret this phraſe: And then the apoſtle does hereby intimate to them the uncertainty of their lives, eſpecially in thoſe times of perſecution. And this conſideration holds in all times, in ſome degree, that our lives are ſhort and uncertain; that it is but a little while that we can ſerve God in this kind, namely, while we are in this world, in this vale of miſery and wants. In the next world there will be no occaſion, no opportunity for it; we ſhall then have nothing to do, but to reap the reward of the good we have done in this life, and to receive that bleſſed ſentence from the mouth of the great Judge of the world, *Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat*, &c. And, *Euge bone, ſerve! Well done, good and faithful ſervant! thou haſt been faithful in a little, and I will make thee ruler over much.* God will then declare his bounty and goodneſs to us, and open thoſe inexhauſtible treaſures of glory and happineſs, which all good men ſhall partake of, in proportion to the good which they have done in this world. Or elſe,

3. (Which I take to be the moſt probable meaning of this phraſe,) It may refer to the degree of this duty, in proportion to our ability and eſtate; as we have ability, *let us do good unto all men.* And this the phraſe will bear, as learned men have obſerved; and it is very reaſonable to take in this ſenſe, at leaſt as part of the meaning of it, either expreſſed, or implied: For without this, we cannot exerciſe charity, though there were never ſo many occaſions for it; and then this precept will be of the ſame importance with that of the ſon of *Sirach*, Ecclus. xxxv. 10. *Give unto the moſt high according as he hath enriched thee*; and with that counſel, *Tob* iv. 7. *Give alms*, ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, *according to thy ſubſtance*; and *ver.* 8. *If thou haſt abundance, give alms accordingly.* And this may be reaſonably expected from us; for where-ever his providence gives a man an eſtate, it is but in truſt for certain uſes and purpoſes, among which charity and alms is the chief: And we muſt be accountable to him, whether we have diſpoſed it faithfully to the ends for which it was committed to us. It is an eaſy thing, with him, to level mens eſtates, and to give every man a competency; but he does on purpoſe ſuffer things to be diſtributed ſo unequally, to try and exerciſe the virtues of men in ſeveral ways; the faith and patience of the poor, the contentedneſs of thoſe in a middle condition, the charity and bounty of the rich. And, in truth, wealth and riches, that is, an eſtate above what ſufficeth our real occaſions and neceſſities, is in no other ſenſe *a bleſſing*, than as it is an opportunity put into our hands, by the providence of God, of doing more good; and if we do not faithfully employ it to this end, it is but a temptation and a ſnare; *and the ruſt of our ſilver and our gold will be a witneſs againſt us*, and we do but *heap up treaſures together againſt the laſt day.*

But what proportion our charity ought to bear to our eſtates, I ſhall not undertake to determine: The circumſtances of men have too much variety in them to admit of any certain rule; ſome may do well, and others may do better; every man as God hath put into his heart, and according to his belief of *the recompence which ſhall be made at the reſurrection of the juſt.* I ſhall only ſay in general, that *if there be firſt a* free and *willing mind*, that will make a man charitable to his power; for *the liberal man will deviſe liberal things.* And we cannot propoſe a better pattern to ourſelves in this kind, than the King and Queen, who are, as they ought to be, (but as it very ſeldom happens) the moſt bright and ſhining examples of this greateſt of all graces and virtues, charity and compaſſion to the poor and perſecuted. I proceed to the

IVth Thing conſiderable in the text, *viz.* Our unwearied perſeverance in this work of doing good; *Let us not be weary in well-doing.* After we have done ſome few acts of charity, yea, though they ſhould be very conſiderable, we muſt not ſit down and ſay we have done enough: There will ſtill be new objects, new occaſions, new opportunities for the exerciſe of our charity, ſpringing up and preſenting themſelves to us. Let us never think that we can do enough in the way of doing good. The beſt and the happieſt beings are moſt conſtant and unwearied in this work of doing good. The holy angels of God are continually employed in *miniſtring for* the good of *thoſe who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation:* And the Son of God, when he appeared in our nature, and *dwelt among us*, that he might be a perfect and familiar example to us of all holineſs and virtue, *he went about doing good* to the bodies, and to the ſouls of men. How diligent and unwearied was he in this work! It was his employment and his pleaſure, his *meat and drink*, the joy and the life of his life. And God himſelf, though he is infinitely and perfectly good in himſelf, yet he ſtill continues *to do good*, and is never weary of this bleſſed work. It is the nature, and the perfection, and the felicity of God himſelf: And how can we be weary of that work, which is an imitation of the higheſt excellency and perfection, and the very eſſence of happineſs?

V. And, laſtly, Here is the argument and encouragement to the chearful diſcharge of this duty; *becauſe in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not: therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men. In due ſeaſon we ſhall reap*; that is, ſooner or later, in this world or in the other, we ſhall receive the full reward of our well-doing.

And now I have explained this duty to you, as plainly and briefly as I could, the hardeſt part of my taſk is yet behind, To perſuade men to the practice of it: And to this purpoſe, I ſhall only inſiſt upon the promiſe in the text, *Be not weary in well-doing; for in due ſeaſon ye ſhall reap, if ye faint not:* We ſhall reap the pleaſure and ſatisfaction of it in our own minds, and all the other mighty advantages of it in this world, and the vaſt and unſpeakable reward of it in the other.

Firſt, We ſhall reap the pleaſure and ſatisfaction of it in our own minds; and there is no ſenſual pleaſure that is comparable to the delight of doing good. This *Cato* makes his boaſt of, as the great comfort and joy of his old age, *Conſcientia bene actæ vitæ, multorumque benefactorum recordatio jucundiſſima.* The remembrance of a well-ſpent life, and of many benefits and kindneſſes done by us to others, is one of the moſt pleaſant things in the world. Senſual pleaſures ſoon die and vaniſh: but that is not the worſt of them, they leave a ſting behind them; and when the pleaſure is gone, nothing remains but guilt, and trouble, and repentance! Whereas the reflection upon any good we have done, is a perpetual ſpring of peace and pleaſure to us, and no trouble and bitterneſs enſues upon it; the thoughts of it lie even and eaſy in our minds; and ſo often as it comes to our remembrance, it miniſters freſh comfort to us.

Secondly, We ſhall likewiſe reap other mighty advantages by it in this world. It is the way to derive a laſting bleſſing on our eſtates. What we give in alms and charity is conſecrated to God, and is one of the chiefeſt and moſt acceptable ſacrifices in the chriſtian religion: ſo the apoſtle tells us, *Hebr.* xiii. 16. *To do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed.* It is like the firſt-fruits under the law, which being dedicated and offered up ro God, did derive a bleſſing upon their whole harveſt.

And it procures for us alſo the bleſſing and prayers of thoſe to whom we extend our charity; their bleſſing, I ſay, upon us and ours, and all that we have: And *is it a ſmall thing in our eye, to have* (as *Job* ſpeaks) *the bleſſing of them who are ready to periſh, to come upon us? The fervent prayer* of the poor for us *availeth much*; for God hath a ſpecial *regard to the prayers of the deſtitute, and his ear is open to their cry.*

Few men have faith to believe it, but certainly charity is a great ſecurity to us in the times of evil, and that not only from the ſpecial promiſe and providence of God, which is engaged to preſerve thoſe from want, who are ready to relieve the neceſſity of others: *Prov.* xi. 25, *The liberal ſoul ſhall be made fat; and he that watereth, ſhall be watered alſo himſelf.* And, *Prov.* xxviii. 27. *He that giveth unto the poor ſhall not lack. He ſhall not be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of dearth he ſhall be ſatisfied*, ſays the Pſalmiſt. But beſides the promiſe and providence of God, our charity and alms are likewiſe a great ſecurity to us, from the nature and reaſon of the thing itſelf. Whoſoever is charitable to others, does wiſely beſpeak the charity and kindneſs of others for himſelf, againſt the day of neceſſity; for there is nothing that makes a man more and ſurer friends, than our bounty; this will plead for us, and ſtand our friend in our greateſt troubles and dangers; *for a good man*, ſaith the apoſtle, that is, for one that is ready to oblige others by great kindneſſes and benefits, *one would even dare to die.* It has ſometimes happened, that the obligation which a man hath laid upon others by a chearful and ſeaſonable charity, hath, in time of danger and extremity, done him more kindneſs than all his eſtate could do for him: *Alms*, ſaith the wiſe man, *hath delivered from death.*

And in times of publick diſtreſs, and when we are beſet with cruel and powerful enemies, who, *if God were not on our ſide, would ſwallow us up quick*, the publick charity of a nation does, many times, prove its beſt ſafeguard and ſhield. There is a moſt remarkable paſſage to this purpoſe, *Ecclus.* xxix. 11, 12, 13. *Lay up thy treaſure according to the commandments of the moſt High, and it ſhall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up alms in thy ſtore-houſes, and it ſhall deliver thee from all affliction. It ſhall fight for thee againſt thine enemies, better than a mighty ſhield, and a ſtrong ſpear.*

And of this I doubt not but we of this nation, by the great mercy and goodneſs of Almighty God, have had happy experience in our late wonderful deliverance, under the conduct and valour of one of the beſt and braveſt of princes, and to whom, by too many among us, the moſt unworthy and unthankful returns have been made, for the unwearied pains he hath undergone, and for the deſperate hazards he hath expoſed himſelf to for our ſakes, that ever were made to ſo great and generous a benefactor; ſo great a benefactor, I ſay, not only to theſe nations, but to all *Europe*, in aſſerting and vindicating their liberties, againſt the inſolent tyranny and pride of one of the greateſt oppreſſors of mankind; of whom I may ſay, as *Job* does of the Leviathan, *Job.* xli. 33, 34. *Upon earth there is not his like: He beholdeth all high things; he is a king over all the children of pride.*

And beyond all this, the bleſſing of God does deſcend upon the poſterity of thoſe who are eminently charitable, and great benefactors to mankind. This *David* obſerves in his time; *I have been young*, (ſays he) *and now am old; yet have I not ſeen the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread:* And what he means by *the righteous man*, he explains in the next words, *he is ever merciful, and lendeth.*

I ſhall only add upon this head, that the practice of this virtue will be one of our beſt comforts at the hour of death, and that we ſhall then look back upon all the good we have done in our life with the greateſt contentment and joy imaginable. *Xenophon*, in his *Cyrus*, which he deſigned for the perfect idea of a good prince, repreſents him, in the laſt minutes of his life, addreſſing himſelf to God to this purpoſe: *Thou knoweſt that I have been a lover of mankind; and now that I am leaving this world, I hope to find that mercy from thee, which I have ſhewed to others.* Theſe words, that excellent heathen hiſtorian thought fit to come from the mouth of ſo excellent a prince, as he had deſcribed him, juſt as he was leaving the world; by which we may ſee what the light of nature thought to be the beſt comfort of a dying man. This brings me to the

Third and laſt particular which I mentioned, the vaſt and unſpeakable reward which this grace and virtue of charity will meet with in the other world. It will plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us a moſt glorious *recompence at the reſurrection of the juſt*, and that proportionable to the degrees of our charity: 2 *Cor.* ix, 6. *He which ſoweth ſparingly, ſhall reap alſo ſparingly; and he which ſoweth bountifully, ſhall reap alſo bountifully.* And from this conſideration, the apoſtle encourageth our perſeverance in well-doing; *Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not*; that is, we ſhall certainly meet with the reward of it, if not in this world, yet in the other.

And now that I have declared this duty to you, together with the mighty pleaſure, and advantages, and rewards of it, I crave leave to preſent you with ſome of the beſt occaſions, and opportunities of the exerciſe and practice of it: And for your encouragement hereto, I ſhall read to you the preſent ſtate of the chief hoſpitals belonging to this great city, and of the diſpoſal of their charity for the laſt year.

And now I have laid before you theſe great objects of your charity, and the beſt arguments I could think of to incline and ſtir up your minds to the exerciſe of this excellent grace and virtue; as there is no time left for it, I having, I am afraid, already tired your patience, ſo, I hope, there is no need to preſs this duty any further upon you, ſince you are ſo willing and forward of yourſelves, and ſo very ready to every good work. This great city hath a double honour due to it, of being both the greateſt benefactors in this kind, and the moſt faithful managers, and diſpoſers of it; and I am now in a place moſt proper for the mention of *Chriſt*'s *Hoſpital*, a proteſtant foundation of that moſt pious and excellent prince *Edward* VI. which, I believe, is one of the beſt inſtances of ſo large and ſo well-managed a charity this day in the world.

And now, to conclude all: If any of you know any better employment than *to do good*; any work that will give truer pleaſure to our minds; that hath greater and better promiſes made to it, *the promiſes of the life that now is, and that which is to come*; that we ſhall reflect upon with more comfort, when we come to die; and that, through the mercies and merits of our bleſſed Saviour, will ſtand us in more ſtead at the day of judgment; let us mind that work: but if we do not, let us apply ourſelves to this buſineſs of charity with all our might, and *let us not be weary in well-doing, becauſe in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.*

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great ſhepherd of the ſheep, through the blood of the everlaſting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, through Jeſus Chriſt; To whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, thankſgiving, and praiſe, both now, and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XC.

The Goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

THE ſubject which I have now propoſed to treat of, is certainly one of the greateſt and nobleſt arguments in the world; *the goodneſs of God*; the higheſt and moſt glorious perfection of the beſt and moſt excellent of beings, than which nothing deſerves more to be conſidered by us, nor ought in reaſon to affect us more. *The goodneſs of God*, is the cauſe, and the continuance of our beings, the foundation of our hopes, and the fountain of our happineſs, our greateſt comfort, and our faireſt example, the chief object of our love, and praiſe, and admiration, the joy and rejoicing of our hearts; and therefore the meditation and diſcourſe of it muſt needs be pleaſant and delightful to us: the great difficulty will be, to confine ourſelves upon ſo copious an argument, and to ſet bounds to that which is of ſo vaſt an extent; *The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

Which words are an argument, which the divine Pſalmiſt uſeth, to ſtir up himſelf and others to the praiſe of God: At the 3d *verſe* he tells us, that *the Lord is great, and greatly to be praiſed*; and he gives the reaſon of this, *ver.* 8, 9. from thoſe properties and perfections of the divine nature, which declare his goodneſs; *The Lord is gracious, and full of compaſſion, ſlow to anger, and of great mercy: The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works:* where you have the goodneſs of God declared, together with the amplitude and extent of it, in reſpect of the objects of it; *The Lord is good to all.*

In the handling of this argument, I ſhall do theſe *four* things:

Firſt, Conſider what is the proper notion of *goodneſs*, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, Shew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Conſider the effects and the extent of it.

Fourthly, Anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to contradict and bring in queſtion the *goodneſs of God*.

Firſt, What is the proper notion of *goodneſs*, as it is attributed to God.

There is a dry *metaphyſical* notion of *goodneſs*, which only ſignifies the *being* and *eſſential properties* of a thing; but this is a good word ill beſtowed; for in this ſenſe every thing that hath *being*, even the devil himſelf, is good.

And there is a *moral* notion of goodneſs; and that is two-fold:

1. More general, in oppoſition to all moral evil and imperfection, which we call ſin and vice; and ſo the *juſtice*, and *truth*, and *holineſs* of God, are in this ſenſe his *goodneſs*. But there is,

2. Another notion of *moral* goodneſs, which is more particular and reſtrained; and then it denotes a particular virtue, in oppoſition to a particular vice; and this is the proper and uſual acceptation of the word *goodneſs*; and the beſt deſcription I can give of it is this, that it is *a certain propenſion and diſpoſition of mind, whereby a perſon is inclined to deſire and procure the happineſs of others*; and it is beſt underſtood by its contrary, which is an envious diſpoſition, a contracted and narrow ſpirit, which would confine happineſs to itſelf, and grudgeth that others ſhould partake of it, or ſhare in it; or a malicious and miſchievous temper, which delights in the harms of others, and to procure trouble and miſchief to them. To communicate and lay out ourſelves for the good of others, is *goodneſs*; and ſo the apoſtle explains *doing good*, by *communicating* to others, who are in miſery, or want: *Hebr.* xiii. 16. *But to do good, and to communicate, forget not.* The *Jews* made a diſtinction between a *righteous* and a *good* man; to which the apoſtle alludes, *Rom.* v, 7. *Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man ſome would even dare to die.* The *righteous* man was he that did no wrong to others; and the *good* man he who was not only not injurious to others, but kind and beneficial to them. So that *goodneſs* is a readineſs and diſpoſition to communicate the good and happineſs which we enjoy, and to be willing others ſhould partake of it.

This is the notion of goodneſs among men; and it is the ſame in God, only with this difference, that God is originally and tranſcendently good: but the creatures are, the beſt of them, but imperfectly good, and by derivation from God, who is the fountain and original of goodneſs; which is the meaning of our Saviour, *Luke* xviii. 19. when he ſays, *There is none good ſave one, that is, God.* But though the degrees of goodneſs in God, and the creatures, be infinitely unequal, and that goodneſs which is in us be ſo ſmall and inconſiderable that, compared with the goodneſs of God, it does not deſerve that name; yet the eſſential notion of *goodneſs* in both muſt be the ſame; elſe when the ſcripture ſpeaks of the goodneſs of God, we could not know the meaning of it; and if we do not at all underſtand what it is for God to be good, it is all one to us (for aught we know) whether he be good or not; for he may be ſo, and we never the better for it; if we do not know what goodneſs in God is, and conſequently when he is ſo, and when not.

Beſides that, the goodneſs of God is very frequently in ſcripture propounded to our imitation; but it is impoſſible for us to imitate that, which we do not underſtand what it is: From whence it is certain, that the goodneſs which we are to endeavour after, is the ſame that is in God; becauſe in this we are commanded to imitate the perfection of God, that is, to be good and merciful as he is, according to the rate and condition of creatures, and ſo far as we, whoſe natures are imperfect, are capable of reſembling the *divine goodneſs*.

Thus much for the notion of *goodneſs* in *God*; *it is a propenſion and diſpoſition in the divine nature, to communicate being and happineſs to his creatures.*

Secondly, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, in the next place, that this perfection of *goodneſs* belongs to God; and that from theſe *three* heads:

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light.

II. From the teſtimony of ſcripture, and divine revelation. And,

III. From the perfection of the divine nature.

I. From the acknowledgments of natural light. The generality of the heathen agree in it, and there is hardly any perfection of God more univerſally acknowledged by them. I always except the ſect of the *Epicureans*, who attribute nothing but *eternity* and *happineſs* to the divine nature; and yet if they would have conſidered it, *happpineſs* without *goodneſs* is impoſſible. I do not find that they do expreſly deny this perfection to God, or that they aſcribe to him the contrary; but they clearly take away all the evidence and arguments of the divine goodneſs; for they ſuppoſed God to be an immortal and happy being, that enjoyed himſelf, and had no regard to any thing without himſelf, that neither gave being to other things, nor concerned himſelf in the happineſs or miſery of any of them; ſo that their notion of a deity was, in truth, the proper notion of an idle being, that is called god, and neither does good nor evil.

But ſetting aſide this atheiſtical ſect, the reſt of the heathens did unanimouſly affirm and believe the goodneſs of God; and this was the great foundation of their religion; and all their prayers to God, and praiſes of him, did neceſſarily ſuppoſe a perſuaſion of the divine goodneſs. Whoſoever prays to God, muſt have a perſuaſion or good hopes of his readineſs to do him good; and to praiſe God, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. *Seneca* hath an excellent paſſage to this purpoſe; "He " (*ſays he*) that denies the goodneſs of God, does not, ſurely, conſider the infinite " number of prayers that, with hands lifted up to heaven, are put up to God, both " in private and publick; which certainly would not be, nor is it credible, that all " mankind ſhould conſpire in this madneſs of putting up their ſupplications to deaf " and impotent deities, if they did not believe that the gods were ſo good as to confer " benefits upon thoſe who prayed to them."

But we need not infer their belief of God's goodneſs from the acts of their devotion, nothing being more common among them than expreſly to attribute this perfection of goodneſs to him; and among the divine titles, this always had the pre-eminence, both among the *Greeks* and *Romans*; ἐῢς τε μέγας τε, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their conſtant ſtile; and in our language, the name of *God* ſeems to have been given him from his *goodneſs*. I might produce innumerable paſſages out of the heathen authors to this purpoſe, but I ſhall only mention that remarkable one out of *Seneca*; *Primns deorum cultus eſt deos credere; deinde reddere illis majeſtatem ſuam, reddere bonitatem, ſine qua nulla majeſtas:* "The firſt act of worſhip is to believe the being " of God; and the next, to aſcribe majeſty or greatneſs to him; and to aſcribe goodneſs, without which there can be no greatneſs."

II. From the teſtimony of ſcripture, and divine revelation. I ſhall mention but a few of thoſe many texts of ſcripture, which declare to us the *goodneſs of God*, Exod. xxxiv. 6. where God makes his name known to *Moſes*; *The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in goodneſs and truth.* Pſal. lxxxvi. 5. *Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive.* Pſal cxix. 68. *Thou art good, and doſt good.* And that which is ſo often repeated in the book of *Pſalms*; *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.* Our bleſſed Saviour attributes this perfection to God, in ſo peculiar and tranſcendent a manner, as if it were incommunicable: *Luke* xviii. 19. *There is none good, ſave one, that is God.* The meaning is, that no creature is capable of it, in that excellent and tranſcendent degree, in which the divine nature is poſſeſſed of it.

To the ſame purpoſe are thoſe innumerable teſtimonies of ſcripture which declare God to be gracious, and merciful, and long-ſuffering; for theſe are but ſeveral branches of his goodneſs: His *grace* is the freeneſs of his goodneſs to thoſe who have not deſerved it: His *mercy* is his goodneſs to thoſe who are in miſery: His *patience* is his goodneſs to thoſe who are guilty, in deferring the puniſhment due to them.

III. The goodneſs of God may likewiſe be argued from the perfection of the divine nature, theſe *two* ways:

1. Goodneſs is the chief of all perfections, and therefore it belongs to God.

2. There are ſome footſteps of it in the creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in God.

1. Goodneſs is the higheſt perfection, and therefore it muſt needs belong to God, who is the moſt perfect of beings. Knowledge and power are great perfections; but ſeparated from goodneſs, they would be great imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An angel may have knowledge and power in a great degree; but yet, for all that, be a devil. Goodneſs is ſo great and neceſſary a perfection, that, without it, there can be no other; it gives perfection to all other excellencies: take away this, and the greateſt excellencies in any other kind, would be but the greateſt imperfections: And therefore our Saviour ſpeaks of the goodneſs and mercy of God, as the ſum of his perfections; what one Evangeliſt hath, *Be ye merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful*, is rendered in another, *Be ye therefore perfect, as*

your father which is in heaven is perfect. Goodneſs is ſo eſſential to a perfect Being, that if we once ſtrip God of this property, we rob him of the glory of all his other perfections; and therefore when *Moſes* deſired to ſee God's glory, he ſaid, *he would make all his goodneſs to paſs before him*, Exod. xxxiii. 19. This is the moſt amiable perfection, and, as it were, the beauty of the divine nature: *Zech.* ix. 17. *How great is his goodneſs, and how great is his beauty!* Sine bonitate, nulla majeſtas; *Without goodneſs, there can be no majeſty.* Other excellencies may cauſe fear and amazement in us; but nothing but goodneſs can command ſincere love and veneration.

2. There are ſome foot-ſteps of this perfection in the creatures, and therefore it muſt be much more eminently in God. There is in every creature ſome repreſentation of ſome divine perfection or other; but God doth not own any creature to be *after his image*, that is deſtitute of goodneſs. The creatures that want reaſon and underſtanding are incapable of this moral goodneſs we are ſpeaking of; man is the firſt in the rank of creatures that is endowed with it, and he is ſaid to be *made after the image of God, and to have dominion given him over the creatures below him*; to ſignify to us, that if man had not been made after God's image, in reſpect of goodneſs, he had been unfit to rule over other creatures: becauſe, without goodneſs, dominion would be tyranny and oppreſſion; and the more any creature partakes of this perfection of goodneſs, the more it reſembles God; as the bleſſed angels, who *behold the face of God continually*, and are thereby *transformed into his image, from glory to glory*, their whole buſineſs and employment is, *to do good*; and the devil, though he reſembles God in other perfections of *knowledge* and *power*, yet becauſe he is evil, and envious, and miſchievous, and ſo contrary to God in this perfection, he is the moſt oppoſite and hateful to him of all creatures whatſoever.

And if this perfection be in ſome degree in the creature, it is much more in God; if it be derived from him, he is much more eminently poſſeſſed of it himſelf. All that goodneſs which is in the beſt-natured of the ſons of men, or in the moſt glorious angels of heaven, is but an imperfect and weak repreſention of the divine goodneſs.

The *third* thing I propoſed to conſider, was, The effects of the divine goodneſs, together with the large extent of it, in reſpect of the objects of it: *The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*; *thou art good, and doeſt good*, ſays *David*, Pſal. cxix. 68. The great evidence and demonſtration of God's goodneſs, is from the effects of it. To the ſame purpoſe St. *Paul* ſpeaks, *Acts* xiv. 17. *He hath not left himſelf without witneſs, in that he doth good, and ſends us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons.*

I ſhall conſider the effects of the divine goodneſs, under theſe *two* heads:

I. The univerſal extent of God's goodneſs to all his creatures.

II. I ſhall conſider more particularly the goodneſs of God to men, which we are more-eſpecially concerned to take notice of.

I. The univerſal extent of his goodneſs to the whole creation; *The Lord is good to all.* The whole creation furniſheth us with clear evidences and demonſtrations of the divine goodneſs; which way ſoever we caſt our eyes, we are encountered with undeniable inſtances of the goodneſs of God; and every thing that we behold, is a ſenſible demonſtration of it; *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament ſheweth his handy-work*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *Pſal.* xix. 1. And again, *Pſal.* xxxiii. 5. *The earth is full of the goodneſs of the Lord.* The whole frame of this world, and every creature in it, and all the ſeveral degrees of being and perfection, which are in the creatures, and the providence of God towards them all, in the preſervation of them, and providing for the happineſs of all of them in ſuch degrees as they are capable of it, are a plentiful demonſtration of the divine goodneſs; which I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate in theſe *four* particulars:

1. The univerſal goodneſs of God appears, in giving being to ſo many creatures.

2. In making them all ſo very good; conſidering the variety, and order, and end of them.

3. In his continual preſervation of them.

4. In providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs of all of them, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it.

1. The extent of God's goodneſs appears, in giving being to ſo many creatures. And this is a pure effect of goodneſs, to impart and communicate being to any thing. Had not God been good, but of an envious, and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all being to himſelf, and been unwilling that any thing beſides himſelf ſhould have been; but his goodneſs prompted him to ſpread and diffuſe himſelf, and ſet his power and wiſdom on work, to give being to all that variety of creatures which we ſee and know to be in the world, and, probably, to infinite more than we have the knowledge of. Now it is not imaginable that Ged could have any other motive to do this, but purely the goodneſs of his nature. All the motives imaginable beſides this, muſt either be indigency and want, or conſtraint and neceſſity; but neither of theſe can have any place in God; and therefore it was *mere goodneſs* that moved him to give being to other things: and therefore all creatures have reaſon, with the four and twenty elders in the *Revelations, to caſt their crowns before the throne of God, ſaying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou haſt created all things, and for thy pleaſure* (that is, of mere goodneſs) *they are, and were created.*

(1.) Indigency and want can have no place in God; becauſe he that hath all poſſible perfection, hath all plenty in himſelf; from whence reſults all-ſufficiency, and compleat happineſs. So that the divine nature need not look out of itſelf for happineſs, being incapable of any addition to the happineſs and perfection it is already poſſeſſed of: *Ipſe ſuis pollens opibus, nihil indiga noſtri.* We make things for our uſe, houſes to ſhelter us, and cloaths to keep us warm; and we propagate our kind, to perpetuate ourſelves in our poſterity: but all this ſuppoſeth imperfection, and want, and mortality; to none of which the divine nature is liable and obnoxious.

Nay, it was not want of glory which made God to make the world. It is true, indeed, the glory of God's goodneſs doth herein appear; and creatures endowed with underſtanding have reaſon to take notice of it with thankfulneſs, praiſe, and admiration: But there is no happineſs redounds to God from it, nor does he feed himſelf with any imaginary content and ſatisfaction, ſuch as vain-glorious perſons have, from the fluttering applauſe of their creatures and beneficiaries. God is really *above all bleſſing and praiſe:* It is great condeſcenſion and goodneſs in him, to accept of our acknowledgments of his benefits, of our imperfect praiſes, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not ſuffer us to ſully his great and glorious name, by taking it into our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happineſs to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happineſs and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and diſpenſe with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and were it not for his goodneſs, might deſpiſe the praiſes of his creatures, with infinitely more reaſon than wiſe men do the applauſe of fools. There is, indeed, one text of ſcripture which ſeems to intimate that God made all creatures for himſelf, as if he had ſome need of them, *Prov.* xvi. 4. *The Lord hath made all things for himſelf; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* Now if by God's *making all things for himſelf*, be meant, that he aimed at and intended the manifeſtation of his wiſdom, and power, and goodneſs in the creation of the world, it is moſt true that, in this ſenſe, *he made all things for himſelf:* But if we underſtand it ſo, as if the goodneſs of his nature did not move him thereto, but he had ſome deſign to ſerve ends and neceſſities of his own upon his creatures, this is far from him. But it is very probable, that neither of theſe are the meaning of this text, which may be rendered, with much better ſenſe, and nearer to the *Hebrew*, thus, *God hath ordained every thing to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained for the day of evil*; that is, the wiſdom of God hath fitted one thing to another, puniſhment to ſin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can neceſſity and conſtraint have any place in God. When there was no creature yet made, nothing in being but God himſelf, there could be nothing to compel him to make any thing, and to extort from him the effects of his bounty: Neither are the creatures neceſſary effects and emanations from the being of God, flowing from the divine eſſence, as water doth from a ſpring, and as light ſtreams from the ſun: If ſo, this, indeed, would have been an argument of the *fulneſs* of the divine nature, but not of the *bounty* and *goodneſs* of it; and it would have been matter of *joy* to us that we are, but not a true ground of *thankfulneſs* from us to God; as we rejoice and are glad that the ſun ſhines, but we do not give it any thanks for ſhining, becauſe it ſhines without any intention or deſign to do us good; it doth not know that we are the better for its light, nor did intend we ſhould be, and therefore we have no reaſon to acknowledge its goodneſs to us.

But God, who is a ſpirit endowed with knowledge and underſtanding, does not act as natural and material cauſes do, which act *neceſſarily* and *ignorantly*; whereas he acts *knowingly* and *voluntarily*, with particular *intention* and *deſign*, knowing that he does good, and intending to do ſo freely, and out of choice, and when he hath no other conſtraint upon him but this, that his goodneſs inclines his will to communicate himſelf and to do good: So that the divine nature is under no neceſſity, but ſuch as is conſiſtent with the moſt perfect liberty, and freeſt choice.

Not but that goodneſs is eſſential to God, and a neceſſary perfection of his nature, and he cannot poſſibly be otherwiſe than good: but when he communicates his goodneſs, he knows what he does, and wills and chuſeth to do ſo.

And this kind of neceſſity is ſo far from being any impeachment of the divine goodneſs, that it is the great perfection and praiſe of it. The *Stoick* philoſophers miſtaking this, do blaſphemouſly advance *their wiſe and virtuous man* above God himſelf; for they reaſon thus; "A wiſe man is good out of *choice*, when he may be "otherwiſe; but God, out of *neceſſity of nature*, and when he cannot poſſibly be "otherwiſe than good." But if they had conſidered things aright, they might have known that this is an imperfection in *their wiſe man*, that he can be otherwiſe than good; for a power to be evil, is impotency and weakneſs. The higheſt character that ever was given of a man, is that which *Velleius Paterculus* gives of *Cato*, that he was *Vir bonus, quia aliter eſſe non potuit*; *A good man, becauſe he could not be otherwiſe:* This applied to a mortal man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but it ſignifies thus much, that it is the higheſt perfection, not to be able to be otherwiſe than good; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, that *goodneſs is eſſential to it:* but the expreſſions and communications of his goodneſs are ſpontaneous and free, deſigned and directed by infinite knowledge and wiſdom.

This is the *firſt*. The *ſecond* particular is, That God hath made all creatures very good, conſidering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I ſhall reſerve to another opportunity.

SERMON XCI.

The Goodneſs of God.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

IN the handling of this argument, I propoſed to do theſe *four* things:

Firſt, To conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, To ſhew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, To conſider the effects of the divine goodneſs, together with the large extent of it, in reſpect of its objects. And,

Fourthly, To anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to contradict, and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of God.

I have conſidered the *two* firſt; and in ſpeaking to the *third*, I propoſed the conſidering theſe *two* things:

I. The univerſal extent of God's goodneſs to all his creatures.

II. More-eſpecially the goodneſs of God to man, which we are more-eſpecially concerned to take notice of, and be affected with.

The *firſt* of theſe appears in theſe *four* particulars:

1. In his giving being to ſo many creatures.
2. In making them all ſo very good, conſidering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and deſign of all of them.
3. In his continual preſervation of them.
4. In his providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs of all of them, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it.

The *firſt* of theſe I ſpoke largely to; I proceed to ſhew in the

2d place, That the univerſal goodneſs of God appears, in making all theſe creatures ſo very good, conſidering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and deſign of all of them. His goodneſs excited and ſet a-work his power to make this world, and all the creatures in it; and that they might be made in the beſt manner that could be, his wiſdom directed his power; *he hath made all things in number, weight, and meaſure*; ſo that they are admirably fitted and proportioned to one another: And that there is an excellent contrivance in all ſorts of beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony in the whole frame of things, is, I think, ſufficiently viſible to every diſcerning and unprejudiced mind. The loweſt form of creatures, I mean thoſe which are deſtitute of ſenſe, do all of them contribute, ſome way or other, to the uſe, and conveniency, and comfort of the creatures above them, which being endowed with ſenſe, are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being ſo palpable in the greateſt part of them, may reaſonably be preſumed, though it be not ſo diſcernable concerning all the reſt; ſo that when we ſurvey the whole creation of God, and the ſeveral parts, we may well cry out with *David*, Pſal. civ. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works? in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.*

It is true, indeed, there are degrees of perfection in the creatures, and God is not equally good to all of them. Thoſe creatures which are of more noble and excellent natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of perfection, they partake more of his *goodneſs*, and are more glorious inſtances of it: But every creature partakes of the divine goodneſs in a certain degree, and according to the nature and capacity of it. God, if he pleaſed, could have made nothing but immortal ſpirits; and he could have made as many of theſe as there are individual creatures of all ſorts in the world; but it ſeemed good to the wiſe Architect, to make ſeveral ranks and orders of beings, and to diſplay his power, and goodneſs, and wiſdom in all imaginable variety of creatures; all which ſhould be good in their kind, though far ſhort of the perfection of angels and immortal ſpirits.

He that will build a houſe for all the uſes and purpoſes of which a houſe is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; muſt not ſo contrive it, as to make it all rooms of ſtate and entertainment; but there muſt of neceſſity be in it meaner materials, rooms and offices for ſeveral uſes and purpoſes, which, however inferior to the reſt in dignity and degree, do yet contribute to the beauty and advantage of the whole: So, in this great frame of the world, it was fit there ſhould be variety, and different degrees of perfection in the ſeveral parts of it; and this is ſo far from being an impeachment of the wiſdom or goodneſs of him that made it, that it is an evidence of both: For the meaneſt of all God's creatures is good, conſidering the nature and rank of it, and the end to which it was deſigned; and we cannot imagine how it could have been ordered and framed better, though we can eaſily tell how it might have been worſe, and that if this or that had been wanting, or had been otherwiſe, it had not been ſo good; and thoſe who have been moſt converſant in the contemplation of nature, and of the works of God, have been moſt ready to make this acknowledgment.

But then if we conſider the creatures of God, with relation to one another, and with regard to the whole frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithſtanding *this* or *that* kind of creatures be much leſs perfect than another, and there be a very great diſtance between the perfection of a *worm*, and of an *angel*; yet conſidering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the creation, it is as good as could be, conſidering its nature and uſe, and the place allotted to it among the creatures.

And this difference in the works of God, between the goodneſs of the ſeveral parts of the creation, and the excellent and perfect goodneſs of the whole, the ſcripture is very careful to expreſs to us in the hiſtory of the creation, where you find God repreſented, as firſt looking upon, and conſidering every day's work by itſelf, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good; *Gen.* i. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25. at the end of every day's work, it is ſaid, that *God ſaw it, and it was good:* but then, when all was finiſhed, and he ſurveyed the whole together, it is ſaid, *ver.* 31. that *God ſaw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good: very good*, that is, *the beſt*; the *Hebrews* having no other ſuperlative. Every creature of God, by itſelf, is *good*; but take the whole together, and they are *very good*, the beſt that could be.

3. The univerſal goodneſs of God further appears, in the careful and continual preſervation of the things which he hath made; his upholding and maintaining the ſeveral creatures in being, in their natural ſtate and order; thoſe which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them; in his preſerving the whole world, his managing and governing this vaſt frame of things, in ſuch ſort, as to keep it from running into confuſion and diſorder. This is a clear demonſtration, no leſs of the goodneſs than of the wiſdom and power of God, that for ſo many ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and performed the offices and work for which nature deſigned them; that the world is not, in the courſe of ſo many thouſand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the frame of things doth not diſſolve and fall in pieces.

And the goodneſs of God doth not only take care of the main, and ſupport the whole frame of things, and preſerve the more noble and conſiderable creatures, but even the leaſt and meaneſt of them. The providence of God doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor deſpiſe any of the works of his hands, ſo as to let them relapſe, and fall back into nothing, through neglect and inadvertency; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, *Pſal.* civ. 27, 28. where the Pſalmiſt, ſpeaking of the innumerable multitude of creatures upon the earth, and in the ſea, *Theſe*, (ſaith he) *wait all upon thee, that thou mayeſt give them their meat in due ſeaſon; that thou giveſt them, they gather; thou openeſt thine hand, and they are filled with good.* And to the ſame purpoſe, *Pſal.* cxlv. 15, 16. *The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou giveſt them their meat in due ſeaſon; thou openeſt thine hand, and ſatisfieſt the deſire of every living thing.* The inanimate creatures, which are without ſenſe; and the brute creatures, which though they have ſenſe, are without underſtanding, and ſo can have no end and deſign of ſelf-preſervation, God preſerves them, no leſs than men who are endowed with reaſon and foreſight to provide for themſelves: *Pſal.* xxxvi. 6. *Thou preſerveſt man and beaſt.* And *Pſal.* cxlvii. 9. *He giveth to the beaſt his food, and to the young ravens which cry.* And ſo our Saviour declares to us the particular providence of God towards thoſe creatures, *Matth.* vi. 26. *Behold the fowls of the air: for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.* Ver. 28, 29. *Conſider the lillies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin: and yet I ſay unto, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of theſe.*

And though all the creatures below man, being without underſtanding, can take no notice of this bounty of God to them, nor make any acknowledgments to him for it; yet *man*, who is the *prieſt* of the viſible creation, and placed here in this great temple of the world, to offer up ſacrifices of praiſe and thankſgiving to God, for his univerſal goodneſs to all his creatures, ought to bleſs God in their behalf, and to ſing praiſes to him, in the name of all the inferior creatures, which are ſubjected to his dominion and uſe; becauſe they are all, as it were, his family, his ſervants and utenſils; and if God ſhould neglect any of them, and ſuffer them to periſh and miſcarry, it is we that ſhould find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we ſhould on their behalf celebrate the praiſes of God; as we find *David* often does in the *Pſalms*, calling upon the inanimate and the brute creatures to praiſe the Lord.

4. The univerſal goodneſs of God doth yet further appear, in providing ſo abundantly for the welfare and happineſs of all his creatures, ſo far as they are capable and ſenſible of it. He doth not only ſupport and preſerve his creatures in being, but takes care that they ſhould all enjoy that happineſs and pleaſure which their natures are capable of. The creatures endowed with ſenſe and reaſon, which only are capable of pleaſure and happineſs, God hath taken care to ſatisfy the ſeveral appetites and inclinations which he hath planted in them; and according as nature hath enlarged their deſires and capacities, ſo he enlargeth his bounty towards them; *He openeth his hand, and ſatisfieth the deſire of every living thing.* God doth not immediately bring meat to the creatures when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it, and to encourage ſelf-preſervation, and to oblige and inſtigate them to it; and that they might not be melancholy and weary of life, he hath ſo ordered the nature of living creatures, that hunger and thirſt are moſt implacable deſires, exceeding painful, and even intolerable; and likewiſe that the ſatisfaction of theſe appeties ſhould be a mighty pleaſure to them. And for thoſe creatures, that are young, and not able to provide for themſelves, God hath planted in all creatures a ϛοργη, a natural affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon ſeeking proviſions for them, and cheriſhing them, with that care and tenderneſs which their weak and helpleſs condition doth require: And reaſon is not more powerful and effectual in mankind to this purpoſe, than this *natural inſtinct* is in brute creatures; which ſhews what care God hath taken, and what proviſion he hath made in the natural frame of all his creatures, for the ſatisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the ſatisfaction whereof is their pleaſure and happineſs. And thus I have done with the *firſt* head I propoſed, the univerſal extent of God's goodneſs to his creatures: Let us now proceed in the

IId place, To conſider more particularly the goodneſs of God to *men*; which we are more-eſpecially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no farther than our own obſervation and experience, to prove the goodneſs of God; every day of our lives *we ſee and taſte that the Lord is good*; all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the divine Goodneſs: *Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights*, Jam. i. 17. And the beſt and moſt perfect of his gifts he beſtows on the ſons of men. What is ſaid of the *wiſdom* of God, *Prov.* viii. may be applied to his *goodneſs*; the goodneſs of God ſhines forth in all the works of the creation, in the heavens and clouds above, and in the fountains of the great deep, in the earth and the fields, but *its delight is with the ſons of men.* Such is the goodneſs of God to *man*, that it is repreſented to us in ſcripture under the notion of *love:* God is good to all his creatures, but he is only ſaid to *love the ſons of men.* More particularly the goodneſs of God to man appears,

1. That he hath given us ſuch noble and excellent beings, and placed us in ſo high a rank and order of his creatures, We owe to him *that* we are, and *what* we are: we do not only partake of that effect of his goodneſs which is common to us with all other creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him for his more eſpecial goodneſs, that he hath made us *reaſonable* creatures of that kind which we ſhould have choſen to have been of, if we could ſuppoſe that, before we were, it had been referred to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this viſible world. But we did not contrive and chuſe this condition for ourſelves, we are no ways acceſſary to the dignity and excellency of our beings: but God choſe this condition for us, and made us what we are; ſo that we may ſay with *David*, Pſal. c. 3, 4, 5. *It is he that hath made us, and not we ourſelves. O enter into his gates with thankſgiving, and into his courts with praiſe; be thankful unto him, and ſpeak good of his name: For the Lord is good.* The goodneſs of God is the ſpring and fountain of our beings; but for *that*, we had been nothing; and but for his farther goodneſs, we might have been any thing, of the loweſt and meaneſt rank of his creatures. But the goodneſs of God hath been pleaſed to advance us to be the top and perfection of the viſible creation; he hath been pleaſed to endow us with mind and underſtanding,

and made us capable of happineſs, in the knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of himſelf. He hath curiouſly and wonderfully wrought the frame of our bodies, ſo as to make them fit habitations for reaſonable ſouls, and immortal ſpirits; he hath made our very bodies veſſels of honour, when of the very ſame clay he hath made innumerable other creatures of a much lower rank and condition: ſo that though man, in reſpect of his body, be akin to the earth, yet, in regard of his ſoul, he is allied to heaven, of a divine original, and deſcended from above. Of all the creatures in this viſible world, man is the chief; and what is ſaid of *Behemoth*, or the elephant, *Job* xlii. in reſpect of his great ſtrength, and the vaſt bigneſs of his body, is only true abſolutely of man, that he is, *Divini opificii caput*; *The chief of the ways of God, and upon earth there is none like him.*

The Pſalmiſt takes particular notice of the goodneſs of God to man, in this reſpect of the excellency and dignity of his being; *Pſal.* viii. 5. *Thou haſt made him little lower than the angels, and haſt crowned him with glory and honour.* And this advantage of our nature above other creatures, we ought thankfully to acknowledge; though moſt men are ſo ſtupid as to overlook it; as *Elihu* complains, *Job* xxxv. 10, 11. *None ſaith, Where is God my maker, who teacheth us more than the beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſer than the fowls of heaven?*

2. The goodneſs of God to *man* appears, in that he hath made and ordained ſo many things chiefly for our uſe. The beauty and uſefulneſs of the creatures below us, their plain ſubſerviency to our neceſſity, and benefit, and delight, are ſo many clear evidences of the divine goodneſs to us, not only diſcernable to our reaſon, but even palpable to our ſenſes, ſo that we may *ſee and taſte that the Lord is gracious.*

This *David* particularly inſiſts upon as a ſpecial ground of praiſe and thankſgiving to God, that he hath ſubjected ſo great a part of the creation to our dominion and uſe; *Pſal.* viii. 6, 7, 8. ſpeaking of man, *Thou haſt made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou haſt put all things under his feet: all ſheep and oxen, yea, and the beaſts of the field: the fowl of the air, and the fiſh of the ſea, and whatſoever paſſeth through the paths of the ſeas.* What an innumerable variety of creatures are there in this inferior world, which were either ſolely or principally made for the uſe and ſervice, pleaſure and delight of man! How many things are there, which ſerve for the neceſſity and ſupport, for the contentment and comfort of our lives! How many things for the refreſhment and delight of our ſenſes, and the exerciſe and employment of our underſtandings! That God hath not made man for the ſervice of other creatures, but other creatures for the ſervice of man, *Epictetus* doth very ingeniouſly argue from this obſervation; That the creatures below man, the brute beaſts, have all things in a readineſs, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging; ſo that they have no abſolute need that any ſhould build houſes, or make cloaths, or ſtore up proviſion, or prepare and dreſs meat for them: *For,* ſays he, *being made for the ſervice of another, they ought to be furniſhed with theſe things, that they may be always in a readineſs to ſerve their lord and maſter; a plain evidence that they were made to ſerve man, and not man to ſerve them.*

And to raiſe our thoughts of God's goodneſs to us the ſons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the creatures *below* us for our uſe and convenience, ſo hath he appointed the creatures *above* us for our guard and protection, not to ſay for our ſervice: *Pſal,* xxxiv. 7. *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*; and then it follows, *O taſte and ſee that the Lord is good!* And *Pſal.* xci. 11, 12. *He ſhall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways: They ſhall bear thee up in their hands.* Nay, the Apoſtle ſpeaks as if their whole buſineſs and employment were to attend upon, and be ſerviceable to good men; *Hebr.* i. 14. *Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?*

The goodneſs of God to *men* appears, in his tender love, and peculiar care of us above the reſt of the creatures, being ready to impart and diſpenſe to us the good that is ſuitable to our capacity and condition, and concerned to exempt us from thoſe manifold evils of want and pain, to which we are obnoxious: I do not mean an abſolute exemption from all ſorts and degrees of evil, and a perpetual tenure of temporal happineſs, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not ſuitable to our preſent ſtate, and the rank and order which we are in among the creatures; nor would it be beſt for us, all things conſidered. But the goodneſs of God to us above other creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency of our natures above them; for, as the Apoſtle reaſons in another caſe, *Doth God take care for oxen,* and ſhall he not much more extend his care to man? To this purpoſe our Saviour reaſons; *Matth.* vi. 26. *Behold the fowls of the air: for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* And *ver.* 30. *Wherefore if God ſo cloath the graſs of the field, which to day is, and to-morrow is caſt into the oven, ſhall he not much more cloath you?* And *chap.* x. 29, 30, 31. *Are not two ſparrows ſold for a farthing? and one of them ſhall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many ſparrows.* It is true, God hath a ſpecial care of his people and ſervants, above the reſt of mankind; but our Saviour uſeth theſe arguments to his diſciples, to convince them of the providence of God towards them, as *men,* and of a more excellent nature than other creatures.

And indeed we are born into the world more deſtitute and helpleſs than other creatures; as if it were on purpoſe to ſhew that God had reſerved us for his more peculiar care and providence; which is ſo great, that the ſcripture, by way of condeſcenſion, expreſſeth it to us by the name of *love*; ſo that what effects of care the greateſt and tendereſt affection in men is apt to produce towards one another, that, and much more, is the effect of God's goodneſs to us: and this affection of God is common to all men, (though, of all creatures, we have leaſt deſerved it) and is ready to diffuſe and ſhed abroad itſelf, where-ever men are qualified for it by duty and obedience, and do not obſtruct and ſtop the emanations of it, by their ſins and provocations.

And though the greateſt part of mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a ſtop to his goodneſs, though it cauſe many abatements of it, and hinder many good things from us: but ſuch is the goodneſs of God, notwithſtanding the evil and undutifulneſs of men, that he is pleaſed ſtill to concern himſelf in the government of the world, and to preſerve the ſocieties of men from running into utter confuſion and diſorder; notwithſtanding the violence and irregularities of mens wills and paſſions, the communities of men ſubſiſt upon tolerable terms; and notwithſtanding the rage and craft of evil men, poor and unarmed innocence and virtue is uſually protected, and, ſometimes, rewarded in this world, and domineering and outrageous wickedneſs is very often remarkably checked and chaſtiſed. All which inſtances of God's providence, as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of mankind, ſo are they an effectual declaration of that goodneſs which governs all things, and of God's kind care of the affairs and concernments of men; ſo that if we look no further than this world, we may ſay with *David, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.*

I know this argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpoſe; That if goodneſs governed the world, and adminiſtred the affairs of it, good and evil would not be ſo careleſly and promiſcuouſly diſpenſed; good men would not be ſo great ſufferers, nor wicked men ſo proſperous as many times they are.

But this alſo, if rightly conſidered, is an effect of God's *goodneſs,* and infinite *patience* to mankind, that *he cauſeth his ſun to riſe, and his rain to fall upon the juſt and unjuſt*; that, upon the provocations of men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confuſion and ruin: This plainly ſhews, that he deſigns this life for the trial of mens virtue and obedience, in order to the greater reward of it; and therefore *he ſuffers men to walk in their own ways,* without any great check and controul, and reſerves the main bulk of rewards and puniſhments for another world: So that all this is ſo far from being any objection againſt the *goodneſs of God,* that, on the contrary, it is an argument of God's immenſe *goodneſs,* and infinite *patience,* that the world ſubſiſts and continues, and that he permits men to take their courſe, for the fuller trial of them, and the clearer and more effectual declaration of his juſtice, in the rewards and puniſhments of another life.

Fourthly and *laſtly,* The goodneſs of God to mankind moſt glorioully appears, in the proviſion he hath made for our *eternal happineſs.* What the happineſs of man ſhould have been, had he continued in innocency, is not particularly revealed to us; but this is certain, that by wilful tranſgreſſions we have forfeited all that happineſs which our natures are capable of. In this lapſed and ruinous condition of mankind, the goodneſs and mercy of God was pleaſed to employ his wiſdom for our recovery, and to reſtore us not only to a new but a greater capacity of *glory* and *happineſs*. And in order to this, the Son of God aſſumes our nature for the recovery and redemption of man; and the pardon of ſin is purchaſed for us by his blood; *eternal life*, and the way to it, are clearly diſcovered to us. God is pleaſed to enter into a new and better covenant with us, and to afford us inward grace and aſſiſtance, to enable us to perform the conditions of it; and graciouſly to accept of our *faith* and *repentance*, of our ſincere reſolutions and endeavours of holineſs and obedience, for *perfect* and *compleat righteouſneſs*, for his ſake who *fulfilled all righteouſneſs*.

This is the great and amazing *goodneſs* of God to mankind, that when we were in open rebellion againſt him, he ſhould entertain thoughts of peace and reconciliation; and when he paſſed by the fallen angels, he ſhould ſet his affection and love upon the ſinful and miſerable ſons of men. And *herein is the love of God to men perfected*, that as he hath made all creatures, both above us, and below us, ſubſervient and inſtrumental to our ſubſiſtence and preſervation; ſo, for the ranſom of our ſouls from eternal ruin and miſery, *he hath not ſpared his own Son, but hath given him up to death for us*; him, whom *he hath commanded all the angels of God to worſhip*, and to whom he hath made ſubject all creatures in heaven and earth; him, *who made the world, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, who is the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon*.

And after ſuch a ſtupendous inſtance as this, what may we not reaſonably hope for, and promiſe ourſelves from the divine goodneſs? So the Apoſtle hath taught us to reaſon; *Rom.* viii. 32. *He that ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all things?*

SERMON XCII.

The Goodneſs of GOD.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

IN handling this argument, I proceeded in this method:

Firſt, To conſider what is the proper notion of goodneſs.

Secondly, To ſhew that this perfection of goodneſs belongs to God.

Thirdly, I conſidered the effects of the divine goodneſs, under theſe heads:

I. The univerſal extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and deſign of the things created by him, and his preſervation, and providing for the welfare and happineſs of them.

II. I conſidered more particularly the goodneſs of God *to mankind*, of which I gave theſe *four* inſtances:

1. That he hath given us ſuch noble beings, and placed us in ſo high a rank and order of his creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained ſo many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciſeth ſo peculiar a providence over us above the reſt, that though he is ſaid *to be good to all*, he is only ſaid *to love the ſons of men*.

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal life and happineſs. There only now remains the

Fourth and laſt particular to be ſpoken to, which was, To anſwer ſome objections which may ſeem to contradict and bring in queſtion the goodneſs of God; and they are many, and have (ſome of them eſpecially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great conſideration and care, to give a clear and ſatiſfactory anſwer to them, which undoubtedly they are capable of; the goodneſs of God being one of the moſt certain and unqueſtionable truths in the world. I ſhall mention thoſe which are moſt conſiderable and obvious, and do almoſt of themſelves ſpring up in every man's mind; and they are theſe *four*; the *firſt* of them more general, the other *three* more particular.

Firſt, If God be ſo exceeding good, whence comes it to paſs that there is ſo much evil in the world, of ſeveral kinds; evil of imperfection, evil of affliction or ſuffering, and (which is the greateſt of all others, and indeed the cauſe of them) evil of ſin?

Secondly, The doctrine of *abſolute reprobation*; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greateſt part of mankind to eternal miſery and torment, without any conſideration or reſpect to their ſin or fault: This ſeems notoriouſly to contradict not only the notion of infinite goodneſs, but any competent meaſure and degree of goodneſs.

Thirdly, The eternal miſery and puniſhment of men for temporal faults, ſeems hard to be reconciled with that exceſs of goodneſs which we ſuppoſe to be in God.

Fourthly, The inſtances of God's great ſeverity to mankind, upon occaſion, in thoſe great calamities which, by the providence of God, have, in ſeveral ages, either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations; and here I ſhall confine myſelf to ſcripture inſtances, as being the moſt certain and remarkable, or at leaſt equal to any that are to be met with in hiſtory; as the early and univerſal degeneracy of mankind, by the ſin and tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents; the deſtruction of the world by a general deluge; the ſudden and terrible deſtruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrha*, and the cities about them, by fire and brimſtone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the *Canaanites*, by the expreſs command of God; and laſtly, the great calamities which befel the *Jewiſh* nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*.

Theſe are the objections againſt the goodneſs of God, which I ſhall ſeverally conſider, and, with all the brevity and clearneſs I can, endeavour to return a particular anſwer to them.

The *firſt* objection, which I told you is more general, is this; If God be ſo exceeding good, whence then comes it to paſs that there is ſo much evil in the world, of ſeveral kinds? It is evident beyond denial, that evil abounds in the world: *The whole world lies in evil*, ſays St. *John*, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *lies in wickedneſs* (ſo our tranſlation renders it) is involved in ſin; but by the article and oppoſition, St. *John* ſeems to intend *the devil*: *We know*, ſays he, *that we are of God, and the whole world*, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *is ſubject to the evil one*, and under his power and dominion. Which way ſoever we render it, it ſignifies, that evil of one kind or other reigns in the world. Now, can evil come from a good God? *Out of the ſame mouth proceedeth bleſſing and curſing? Doth a fountain ſend forth at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter? This cannot be*, as St. *James* ſpeaks in another caſe. But all evils that are in the world, muſt either be directly *procured* by the divine providence, or *permitted* to happen; and next to the *cauſing* and *procuring* of evil, it ſeems to be contrary to the goodneſs of God, to *permit* that there ſhould be any ſuch thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

Anſw. To give an account of this: It was an ancient doctrine of ſome of the moſt ancient nations, that there were two firſt cauſes or principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad; which, among the *Perſians*, were called *Oromaſdes* and *Arimanius*; among the *Egyptians*, *Oſiris* and *Typhon*; among the *Chaldeans*, good or bad planets; among the *Greeks*, Ζεὺς and Ἅδης: *Plutarch* expreſly ſays that the *good principle* was called *God*, and the *bad*, *Dæmon*, or *the Devil*; in conformity to which ancient traditions, the *Manichees* (a ſad ſect of chriſtians) ſet up two principles, the one infinitely good, which they ſuppoſed to be the original cauſe of all good that is in the world; the other infinitely evil, to which they aſcribed all the evils that are in the world.

But beſides that the notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpoſe to ſuppoſe two oppoſite principles of equal power and force. That the very notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, will be very clear, if we conſider, that what is infinitely evil, muſt be infinitely imperfect, and conſequently infinitely weak; and for that reaſon, though never ſo miſchievous and malicious, yet being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and fooliſh, would neither be in a capacity to contrive miſchief, nor to execute it. But admit that a being infinitely miſchievous were infinitely cunning, and infinitely powerful, yet it could do no evil; becauſe the oppoſite principle of infinite goodneſs, being alſo infinitely wiſe and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands: ſo that, upon this ſuppoſition, the notion of a deity would ſignify juſt nothing, and by virtue of the eternal oppoſition and equality of theſe two principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual bay, and, being an equal match for one another, inſtead of being two deities, they would be two idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

But to return a more diſtinct and ſatisfactory anſwer to this objection: There are three ſorts of evil in the world; the evil of imperfection; the evil of affliction and ſuffering; and the evil of ſin.

And, *firſt*, for the evil of imperfection, I mean, natural imperfections; theſe are not ſimply and abſolutely, but only comparatively evil: Now comparative evil is but a leſs degree of goodneſs; and it is not at all inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, that ſome creatures ſhould be leſs good than others, that is, imperfect in compariſon of them; nay, it is very agreeable both to the goodneſs and wiſdom of God, that there ſhould be this variety in the creatures, and that they ſhould be of ſeveral degrees of perfection, being made for ſeveral uſes and purpoſes, and to be ſubſervient to one another, provided they all contribute to the harmony and beauty of the whole.

Some imperfection is neceſſarily involved in the very nature and condition of a creature, as that it derives its being from another, and neceſſarily depends upon it, and is beholden to it, and is likewiſe of neceſſity finite and limited in its nature and perfections; and as for thoſe creatures which are leſs perfect than others, this alſo, that there ſhould be degrees of perfection, is neceſſary, upon ſuppoſition, that the wiſdom of God thinks fit to diſplay itſelf in variety of creatures of ſeveral kinds and ranks: For though, comparing the creatures with one another, the angelical nature is beſt, and moſt perfect; yet it is abſolutely beſt, that there ſhould be other creatures beſides angels. There are many parts of the creation which are raſhly and inconſiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as ſome noxious and hurtful creatures, which yet in other reſpects, and to ſome purpoſes, may be very uſeful, and againſt the harm and miſchief whereof we are ſufficiently armed, by ſuch means of defence, and ſuch antidotes, as reaſon and experience are able to find and furniſh us withal; and thoſe parts of the world which we think of little or no uſe, as rocks and deſarts, and that vaſt wilderneſs of the ſea, if we conſider things well, are of great uſe to ſeveral very conſiderable purpoſes; or if we can diſcern no other uſe of them, they ſerve at leaſt to help our dullneſs, and to make us more attentively to conſider and to admire the perfection and uſefulneſs of the reſt; at the worſt, they may ſerve, for foils to ſet off the wiſe order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expreſſeth it very well) they may be like a black-moor's head in a picture, which gives the greater beauty to the whole piece.

Secondly, For the evils of affliction and ſuffering; and theſe either befal brute creatures, or men endowed with reaſon and conſideration.

1ſt, For thoſe which befal the brute creatures; thoſe ſufferings which nature inflicts upon them are very few; the greateſt they meet withal are from men, or upon their account, for whoſe ſake they were chiefly made, and to whoſe reaſonable uſe and gentle dominion they are conſigned.

It is neceſſary, from the very nature of theſe creatures, that they ſhould be paſſive, and liable to pain; and yet it doth in no wiſe contradict either the wiſdom or goodneſs of God to make ſuch creatures, becauſe all theſe pains are, for the moſt part, fully recompenced by the pleaſure theſe creatures find in life; and that they have ſuch a pleaſure and happineſs in life, is evident, in that all creatures, notwithſtanding the miſeries they endure, are ſtill fond of life, and unwilling to part with it: no creature but man (who only hath perverted his nature) ever ſeeks the deſtruction of itſelf; and ſince all brute creatures are ſo loth to go out of being, we may probably conclude, that if they could deliberate whether they ſhould be, or not, they would chuſe to come into being, even upon theſe hard conditions.

But however that be, this we are ſure of, that they ſuffer chiefly from us, and upon our account; we, who are their natural lords, having depraved ourſelves firſt, are become cruel and tyrannical to them; nay, the ſcripture tells us, that they ſuffer for our ſakes, and *the whole creation groaneth, and is in bondage*, for the ſin of man. And this is not unreaſonable, that being made principally for man, they ſhould ſuffer upon his account, as a part of his goods and eſtate; not as a puniſhment to them, (which, under the notion of *puniſhment*, they are not capable of) but as a puniſhment to him who is the lord and owner of them, they being by this means become more weak and frail, and leſs uſeful and ſerviceable to him for whom they were made; ſo that the ſufferings of the creatures below us are, in a great meaſure, to be charged upon us, under whoſe dominion God hath put them.

2dly, As for the afflictions and ſufferings which befal men, theſe are not natural and of God's making, but the reſult and fruit of our own doings, the effects and conſequences of the ill uſe of our own liberty, and free choice; and God does not willingly ſend them upon us, but we wilfully pull them down upon ourſelves; for *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*, as the Prophet tells us, *Lam.* iii. 33. Or, as it is in the *Wiſdom of Solomon*, chap. i. 12, 13. *God made not death, neither hath he pleaſure in the deſtruction of the living; but men pull deſtruction upon themſelves, with the works of their own hands.* All the evils that are in the world, are either the effects of our own ſin, as poverty, and diſgrace, pains, diſeaſes, and death, which are ſometimes more immediately inflicted upon men by a viſible providence and hand of God, but are uſually brought upon us by ourſelves, in the natural courſe and order of things; or they are the effects of other mens ſins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetouſneſs, by the malice and cruelty of others: And theſe evils, though they are procured and cauſed by others, yet they are deſerved by ourſelves; and though they are immediately from the hand of men, yet we ought to look farther, and conſider them as directed and diſpoſed by the providence of God; as *David* did when *Shimei* curſed him; *God*, ſaith he, *hath bid him curſe David*, though it immediately proceeded from *Shimei*'s inſolence and ill-nature.

Now upon the ſuppoſition of ſin, the evils of affliction and ſuffering are good, becauſe they are of great uſe to us, and ſerve to very good ends and purpoſes.

1. As they are the proper puniſhments of ſin. Evil is good to them that do evil; that is, it is fit and proper, juſt and due: *Pſal.* cvii. 17. *Fools, becauſe of their tranſgreſſion, and becauſe of their iniquities, are afflicted.* And it is fit they ſhould be ſo; crooked to crooked, is ſtreight and right. *A rod for the back of fools*, ſaith *Solomon*; and elſewhere, *God hath made every thing for that which is fit for it, and the evil day for the wicked man.*

2dly, As they are the preventions and remedies of greater evils. Evils of affliction and ſuffering are good for wicked men, to bring them to a ſenſe of their ſin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal evils, and preſerve them from eternal miſery; and not only good to the perſon that ſuffers, but likewiſe to others, to deter and affright them from the like ſins; to prevent the contagion of ſin, and to ſtop the progreſs of iniquity, upon which greater guilt and worſe miſchiefs might enſue; and they are good to good men, to awaken and rouze them out of their ſecurity, to make them know God and themſelves better; they are almoſt a neceſſary diſcipline for the beſt of men, much more for evil and depraved diſpoſitions; and we might as reaſonably expect that there ſhould be no rod in a ſchool, as that there ſhould be no ſuffering and afflictions in the world.

3dly, As they are the occaſions and matter of many virtues. God teacheth men temperance by want, and patience by reproach and ſufferings, charity by perſecution, and pity and compaſſion to others by grievous pains upon ourſelves. The benefit of afflictions, to them that make a wiſe uſe of them, is unſpeakable; they are *grievous* in themſelves, *nevertheleſs* (ſaith the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews*) *they bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs, to them that are exerciſed therewith*, *David* gives a great teſtimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them, from his own experience; *Pſal.* cxix. 67. *Before I was afflicted, I went aſtray, but now have I kept thy word.* And *ver.* 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy ſtatutes.*

4thly, The evils of ſuffering, patiently ſubmitted to, and decently borne, do greatly contribute to the increaſe of our happineſs. All the perſecutions and ſufferings of good men in this life, *do work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* And if they contribute to our greater good and happineſs at laſt, they are good. The glorious reward of the ſufferings which we have met with in this life, will in the next clear up the goodneſs and juſtice of the divine providence from all thoſe miſts and clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from thoſe objections which are now raiſed againſt it, upon account of the afflictions and ſufferings of good men in this life, which *are not worthy to be compared with the glory which ſhall be revealed in them.*

III. As for the evil of ſin, which is the great difficulty of all, How is it conſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, to permit ſo great an evil as this to come into the world? For anſwer to this, I deſire theſe *two* things may be conſider'd:

1. That it doth not at all contradict the wiſdom or goodneſs of God, to make a creature of ſuch a frame, as to be capable of having its obedience tried, in order to the reward of it; which could not be, unleſs ſuch a creature were made mutable, and, by the good or bad uſe of its liberty, capable of obeying or diſobeying the laws of his Creator: for where there is no poſſibility of ſinning, there can be no trial of our virtue and obedience; and nothing but virtue and obedience are capable of reward. The goodneſs of God towards us is ſufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happineſs, and gave us ſufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end; and it does in no wiſe contradict his goodneſs, that he does not, by his omnipotency, interpoſe to prevent our ſin: for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let man be the creature he made him, capable of reward or puniſhment, according to the good or bad uſe of his own free choice. It is ſufficient that God made man good at firſt, though mutable, and that he had a power to have continued ſo, though he wilfully determined himſelf to evil: This acquits the goodneſs of God, that *he made man upright, but he found out* to himſelf *many inventions.*

2. If there had not been ſuch an order and rank of creatures as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifeſtation of God's goodneſs in a way of mercy and patience: So that though God be not the author of the ſins of men, yet, in caſe of their wilful tranſgreſſion and diſobedience, the goodneſs of God hath a fair opportunity of diſcovering it ſelf, in his patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, and in his merciful care and proviſion for their recovery out of that miſerable ſtate. And this may ſuffice for anſwer to the *firſt* objection, If God be ſo good, whence then comes evil?

The *ſecond* objection againſt the goodneſs of God, is from the doctrine of *abſolute reprobation:* By which I mean, The decreeing the greateſt part of mankind to eternal miſery and torment, without any conſideration or reſpect to their ſin and fault. This ſeems not only notoriouſly to contradict the notion of infinite goodneſs, but to be utterly inconſiſtent with the leaſt meaſure and degree of goodneſs. Indeed, if by *reprobation* were only meant, that God, in his own infinite knowledge foreſees the ſins and wickedneſs of men, and hath from all eternity determined in himſelf, what in his word he hath ſo plainly declared, that he will puniſh impenitent ſinners with everlaſting deſtruction; or if by *reprobation* be meant, that God hath not elected all mankind, that is, abſolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to ſalvation: neither of theſe notions of *reprobation* is any ways inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of God; for he may foreſee the wickedneſs of men, and determine to puniſh it, without any impeachment of his goodneſs: He may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the ſame degree: If God pleaſe to bring any *infallibly* to ſalvation, this is tranſcendent goodneſs; but if he put all others into a *capacity* of it, and uſe *all neceſſary and fitting means* to make them happy, and, after all this, any fall ſhort of happineſs through their own wilful fault and obſtinacy; theſe men are evil and cruel to themſelves, but God hath been very *good* and merciful to them.

But if by *reprobation* be meant, either that God hath decreed, without reſpect to the ſins of men, their abſolute ruin and miſery, or that he hath decreed that they ſhall inevitably ſin and periſh; it cannot be denied, but that ſuch a *reprobation* as this doth clearly overthrow all poſſible notion of goodneſs. I have told you, That the true and only notion of *goodneſs* in God is this, That it is *a propenſion and diſpoſition of the divine nature, to communicate being and happineſs to his creatures:* But ſurely nothing can be more plainly contrary to *a diſpoſition to make them happy,* than *an abſolute decree, and a peremptory reſolution to make them miſerable.* God is infinitely better than the beſt of men, and yet none can poſſibly think *that* man a good man, who ſhould abſolutely reſolve to diſinherit and deſtroy his children, without the foreſight and conſideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the goodneſs of God; but it is not an eaſy matter to deviſe to ſay any thing worſe than this of the devil.

But it is ſaid, *reprobation* is an act of *ſovereignty* in God, and therefore not to be meaſured by the common rules of *goodneſs*. But it is *contrary* to goodneſs, and plainly *inconſiſtent* with it; and we muſt not attribute ſuch a *ſovereignty* to God, as contradicts his *goodneſs*; for if the *ſovereignty* of God may break in at pleaſure upon his other attributes, then it ſignifies nothing to ſay, that God is *good*, and *wiſe*, and *juſt* if his *ſovereignty* may at any time act contrary to theſe perfections.

Now if the doctrine of *abſolute reprobation*, and the *goodneſs* of God, cannot poſſibly ſtand together, the queſtion is, which of them ought to give way to the other? What St. *Paul* determines in another caſe, concerning the *truth* and *fidelity* of God, will equally hold concerning his *goodneſs*; *Let God be* good, *and every man a liar*. The doctrine of *abſolute reprobation* is no part of the doctrine of the holy ſcriptures, that ever I could find; and there's the rule of our faith. If ſome great divines have held this doctrine, not in oppoſition to the goodneſs of God, but hoping they might be reconciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the ſchools of the greateſt divines be called in queſtion, than the *goodneſs* of God, which, next to his *being*, is the greateſt and cleareſt truth in the world.

Thirdly, It is farther objected, That the eternal puniſhment of men, for temporal faults, ſeems hard to be reconciled with that exceſs of goodneſs, which we ſuppoſe to be in God.

This objection I have fully anſwered, in a diſcourſe upon St. *Matthew*, chap. xxv. 46. and therefore ſhall proceed to the

Fourth and *laſt* objection againſt the *goodneſs* of God, from ſundry inſtances of God's ſeverity to mankind, in thoſe great calamities which, by the providence of God, have in ſeveral ages either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations.

And here I ſhall confine myſelf to ſcripture inſtances, as being moſt known, and moſt certain and remarkable, or at leaſt equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other hiſtory; ſuch are the early and univerſal degeneracy of all mankind, by the ſin and tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents; the deſtruction of the world by a general deluge; the ſudden and terrible deſtruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, and the cities about them, by fire and brimſtone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the *Canaanites* by the expreſs command of God; and, laſtly, the great calamities which befel the *Jewiſh* nation, eſpecially the final ruin and diſperſion of them at the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*: Theſe, and the like inſtances of God's ſeverity, ſeem to call in queſtion his *goodneſs*.

Againſt theſe ſevere and dreaful inſtances of God's ſeverity, it might be a ſufficient vindication of his goodneſs, to ſay in general, that they were all upon great and high provocations; and moſt of them after long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readineſs in God to have prevented or removed them, upon repentance; all which are great inſtances of the goodneſs of God: But yet, for the clearer manifeſtation of the *divine Goodneſs*, I ſhall conſider them particularly and as briefly as I can.

1. As for the tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents, and the diſmal conſequences of it to all their poſterity: This is a great depth; and though the ſcripture mentions it, yet it ſpeaks but little of it; and in matters of mere revelation, we muſt not attempt *to be wiſe above what is written*. Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and wilful diſobedience to a very plain and eaſy command; and that, in the puniſhment of it, God mitigated the extremity of the ſentence, (which was preſent death) by granting our firſt parents the reprieve of almoſt a thouſand years: And as to the conſequences of it to their poſterity, God did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of mankind; and though he removed them out of that happy ſtate and place in which man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon earth: And, which is certainly the moſt glorious inſtance of divine Goodneſs that ever was, he was pleaſed to make the fall and miſery of man, the happy occaſion of ſending his Son in our nature for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition than that from which we fell. So the

Apoſtle tells us at large, *Rom.* v. that *the grace of God by Jeſus Chriſt*, hath redounded much more to our benefit and advantage, than *the ſin and diſobedience of our firſt parents* did to our prejudice.

2. For the general deluge, though it look very ſevere, yet if we conſider it well, we may plainly diſcern much of goodneſs in it; it was upon great provocation, by the univerſal corruption and depravation of mankind: *The earth was filled with violence, and all fleſh had corrupted its ways; the wickedneſs of man was great upon the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*; which is not a deſcription of *original* ſin, but of the *actual* and *improved* wickedneſs of mankind: And yet when the wickedneſs of men was come to this height, God gave them fair warning, before he brought this calamity upon them, *when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah*, for the ſpace of *an hundred and twenty years*; at laſt, when nothing would reclaim them, and almoſt the whole race of mankind were become ſo very bad, that it is ſaid, *It repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart*; when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue ſo, God, in pity to mankind, and to put a ſtop to their growing wickedneſs and guilt, ſwept them away all at once from the face of the earth, except one family, which he had preſerved from this contagion, to be a new ſeminary of mankind, and, as the heathen poet expreſſeth it, *Mundi melioris origo, The ſource and original of a better race.*

3. For that terrible deſtruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* by *fire and brimſtone* from heaven, it was not brought upon them 'till *the cry of their ſin was great, and gone up to heaven*; 'till by their unnatural luſts they had provoked ſupernatural vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms God was pleaſed to condeſcend to *Abraham* for the ſparing of them; *Gen.* xviii. 32. if in thoſe *five* cities there had been found *but ten righteous perſons, he would not have deſtroyed them for thoſe ten's ſake.* So that we may ſay with the Apoſtle, *Behold the goodneſs and ſeverity of God!* Here was wonderful *goodneſs* mixed with this great *ſeverity*.

4. For the extirpation of the *Canaanites*, by the expreſs command of God, which hath ſuch an appearance of ſeverity, it is to be conſidered, that this vengeance was not executed upon them, 'till they were grown ripe for it. God ſpared them for above four hundred years, for ſo long their growing impiety is taken notice of, *Gen.* xv. 16. where it is ſaid that *the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full:* God did not proceed to cut them off 'till their caſe was deſperate, paſt all hopes of recovery, 'till *the land was defiled with abominations*, and ſurcharged with wickedneſs to that degree, as to *ſpue out its inhabitants*; as is expreſly ſaid, *Lev.* xviii. 28. When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to ſpare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and miſery to themſelves.

Fifthly and *laſtly*, As for the great calamities which God brought upon the *Jews*, eſpecially in their final ruin and diſperſion at the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*; not to inſiſt upon the known hiſtory of their multiplied rebellions and provocations, of their deſpiteful uſage of God's prophets whom he ſent to warn them of his judgments, and to call them to repentance; of their obſtinate refuſal to receive correction, and to be brought to amendment, by any means that God could uſe; for all which provocations, he at laſt delivered them into their enemies hands, to carry them away captive: Not to inſiſt upon this, I ſhall only conſider their final deſtruction by the *Romans*, which though it be dreadfully ſevere, beyond any example of hiſtory, yet the provocation was proportionable; for this vengeance did not come upon them, 'till they had, as it were, extorted it, by the moſt obſtinate impenitency and unbelief, in *rejecting the counſel of God againſt themſelves*, and reſiſting *ſuch means* as would have brought *Tyre* and *Sidon*, *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, to *repentance*; 'till they had deſpiſed the doctrine of life and ſalvation, delivered to them by the Son of God, and confirmed from heaven by the cleareſt and greateſt miracles; and *by wicked hands* had *crucified and ſlain* the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Nay, even after this greateſt of ſins that ever was committed, God waited for their repentance forty years, to ſee if in that time they would be brought to a ſenſe of their ſins, and *to know the things which belonged to their peace.* And no wonder if, after ſuch provocations, and ſo much patience, and ſo obſtinate an impenitency, the *goodneſs* of God at laſt gave way to his *juſtice*, and *wrath came upon them to the utmoſt.*

So that all theſe inſtances, rightly conſidered, are rather *commendations* of the divine *goodneſs*, than juſt and reaſonable *objections* againſt it; and notwithſtanding the ſeverity of them, it is evident that God is *good*, from the *primary inclinations of his nature*; and *ſevere* only upon *neceſſity*, and in caſe of *juſt provocation*. And to be otherwiſe, not to puniſh inſolent impiety and incorrigible wickedneſs in a ſevere and remarkable manner, would not be *goodneſs*, but a *fond indulgence*; not *patience*, but *ſtupidity*; not *mercy* to mankind, but *cruelty*: becauſe it would be an encouragement to them to do more miſchief, and to bring greater miſery upon themſelves.

So that if we ſuppoſe God to be *holy* and *juſt*, as well as *good*, there is nothing in any of theſe inſtances, but what is very conſiſtent with all that goodneſs which we can ſuppoſe to be in a *holy*, and *wiſe*, and *juſt Governor*, who is a declared enemy to ſin, and is reſolved to give all fitting diſcountenance to the breach and violation of his laws. It is neceſſary, in kindneſs and compaſſion to the reſt of mankind, that ſome ſhould be made remarkable inſtances of God's ſeverity; that the puniſhment of a few, may be a warning to all, *that they may hear and fear*, and, by avoiding the like ſins, may prevent the like ſeverity upon themſelves.

And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the *goodneſs* of God; the conſideration whereof is fruitful of many excellent and uſeful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and our duty: But theſe I ſhall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON XCIII.

The Goodneſs of God.

PSAL. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

I HAVE made ſeveral diſcourſes upon this argument, Of the *goodneſs* of God; ſhewing what it is; on what accounts we aſcribe it to God; what are the effects and large extent of it to the whole creation, and more particularly to mankind; and, in the laſt place, conſidered the ſeveral objections which ſeem to lie againſt it. I proceed now to the application of this excellent argument, the conſideration whereof is ſo fruitful of uſeful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and duty. And,

I. This ſhews us the prodigious folly and unreaſonableneſs of atheiſm. Moſt of the atheiſm that is in the world, doth not ſo much conſiſt in a firm perſuaſion that there is no God, as in vain wiſhes and deſires that there were none. Bad men think it would be a happineſs to them, and that they ſhould be in a much better condition if there were no God, than if there be one. *Nemo deum non eſſe credit, niſi cui Deum non eſſe expedit*; *No man is apt to disbelieve a God, but he whoſe intereſt it is that there ſhould be none.* And if we could ſee into the hearts of wicked men, we ſhould find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a God, he is juſt, and will puniſh ſin; that he is infinite in power, and not to be reſiſted, and therefore kills them with his terror ſo often as they think of him: Hence they apprehend it their intereſt that there ſhould be no God, and wiſh there were none, and thence are apt to cheriſh in their minds a vain hope that there is none, and at laſt endeavour to impoſe upon themſelves by vain reaſonings, and to ſupreſs the belief of a God, and to ſtifle their natural apprehenſions and fears of him. So that it is not *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, *Fear that firſt made gods*; but the fear which bad men have of divine power and juſtice, that firſt tempted them to the diſbelief of him.

But were not theſe men as fooliſh as they are wicked, they would wiſh with all their hearts there were a God, and be glad to believe ſo: And the *Pſalmiſt* gives them their true character, who can entertain any ſuch thoughts or wiſhes; *Pſal.* xiv. 1. *The fool hath ſaid in his heart, There is no God:* For they are *fools* who do not underſtand nor conſult their true intereſt. And if this be true which I have ſaid concerning the *goodneſs* of God; if this be his nature, to deſire and procure the happineſs of his creatures; whoever underſtands the true nature of God, and his own true intereſt, cannot but wiſh there were a God, and be glad of any argument to prove it, and rejoyce to find it true; as children are glad of a kind and tender father, and as ſubjects rejoyce in a wiſe and good prince.

The *goodneſs* of God gives us a lovely character of him, makes him ſo good a Father, ſo gracious a Governor of men, that if there were no ſuch being in the world, it were infinitely deſirable to mankind that there ſhould be: He is ſuch an one, *Qualem omnes cuperent, ſi deeſſet*; *As, if he were wanting, all men ought to wiſh for.* The being of God is ſo comfortable, ſo convenient, ſo neceſſary to the felicity of mankind, that (as *Tully* admirably ſays) *Dii immortales ad uſum hominum fabricati penè videantur*; *If God were not a neceſſary being of himſelf, he might almoſt ſeem to be made on purpoſe for the uſe and benefit of men:* So that atheiſm is not only an inſtance of the moſt horrible impiety, but of the greateſt ſtupidity; and for men to glory in their diſbelief of a God, is like the rejoycing and triumph of a furious and beſotted multitude, in the murder of a wiſe and good prince, the greateſt calamity and confuſion that could poſſibly have befallen them.

If the evidence of God's being were not ſo clear as it is, yet the conſideration of his *goodneſs* ought to check all inclination to atheiſm and infidelity; for if he be as *good* as he is repreſented to us, both by natural light, and divine revelation, (and he is ſo, as ſure as he is) if he tender our welfare, and deſire our happineſs, as much as we ourſelves can do, and uſe all wiſe ways and proper means to bring it about; then it is plainly every man's intereſt, even thine, O ſinner! to whom, after all thy provocations, he is willing to be reconciled, that there ſhould be ſuch a being as God is; and whenever thou comeſt to thyſelf, thou wilt be ſenſible of thy want of him, and thy *ſoul* will *thirſt for God, even the living God, and pant after him, as the hart pants after the water-brooks*; in the day of thy affliction and calamity, *when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon thee*, thou wilt flee to God for refuge, and ſhelter thyſelf under his protection, and wouldeſt not, for all the world, but there were ſuch a being in it to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo ſanus timet* (ſays *Seneca*); *furor eſt metuere ſalutaria*; *No man in his wits is afraid there is a God: It is a madneſs to fear that which is ſo much for our benefit and advantage.* Human nature is conſcious to itſelf of its own weakneſs and inſufficiency, and of its neceſſary dependance upon ſomething without itſelf for its happineſs; and therefore, in great extremity and diſtreſs, the atheiſt himſelf hath naturally recourſe to him; and he who denied and rejected him in his proſperity, clings to him in adverſity, as his *only ſupport and preſent help in time of trouble.* And this is a ſure indication, that theſe men, after all their endeavours to impoſe upon themſelves, have not been able wholly to extinguiſh in their minds the belief of God, and his goodneſs; nay, it is a ſign, at the bottom of their hearts they have a firm perſuaſion of his *goodneſs*, when, after all their inſolent defiance of him, they have the confidence to apply themſelves to him for *mercy and help, in time of need:* And therefore our hearts ought to riſe with indignation againſt thoſe who go about to perſuade the belief of a thing ſo prejudicial to our intereſt, to take away *the light of our eyes, and the breath of our noſtrils*, and to rob us of all the comfort and ſupport, which the belief of an infinite power, conducted by infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, is apt to afford to mankind.

II. We ſhould take great care of preventing and abuſing this great *goodneſs*, by vain confidence and preſumption. This is a provocation of an high nature, which the ſcripture calls, *turning the grace of God into wantonneſs*; making that an encouragement to ſin, which is one of the ſtrongeſt arguments in the world againſt it. God is infinitely *good* and *merciful:* but we muſt not therefore think that he is *fond and indulgent to our faults*; but, on the contrary, becauſe he is *good*, he cannot but *hate evil.* So the ſcripture every-where tells us, that *He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*; that *the face of the Lord is againſt them that do evil: He is*

not

not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with him: The fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in his ſight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity. He is ready to ſhew mercy to thoſe who are qualified for it by repentance, and reſolution of a better courſe: but as long as we continue impenitent, God is implacable, and will deal with us according to the tenor of his laws, and the deſert of our doings. Deſpair is a great ſin, but preſumption is a greater; deſpair doubts of the goodneſs of God, but preſumption abuſeth it; deſpair diſbelieves, but preſumption perverts the beſt thing in the world to a quite contrary purpoſe from what it was intended.

III. The conſideration of God's goodneſs, is a mighty comfort and relief to our minds, under all our fears and troubles. Great are the fears and jealouſies of many devout minds concerning God's love to them, and their everlaſting condition; which are commonly founded in one of theſe two cauſes, a melancholy temper, or miſtaken notions and apprehenſions of God; and very often theſe two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.

Melancholy, as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a diſeaſe not to be cured by reaſon and argument, but by phyſick and time: but the miſtakes which men have entertained concerning God, if they be not ſet on and heightened by melancholy, (as many times they are) may be rectified by a true repreſentation of the *goodneſs* of God, confirmed by reaſon and ſcripture. Many good men have had very hard and injurious thoughts of God inſtilled into them, from doctrines too commonly taught and received; as if he did not ſincerely deſire the happineſs of his creatures, but had from all eternity decreed to make the greateſt part of mankind, with a ſecret purpoſe and deſign to make them miſerable, and, conſequently, were not ſerious and in a good earneſt in his invitations and exhortations of ſinners to repentance; and it is no wonder if ſuch jealouſies as theſe concerning God, make men doubtful whether God love them, and very ſcrupulous and anxious about their everlaſting condition.

I have already told you, that theſe harſh doctrines have no manner of foundation, either in reaſon or ſcripture; that God earneſtly deſires our happineſs, and affords us ſufficient means to that end; that he bears a more hearty good-will to us, than any man does to his friend, or any father upon earth ever did to his deareſt child; in compariſon of which, the greateſt affection of men to thoſe whom they love beſt, is *but as the drop of the bucket, as the very ſmall duſt upon the ballance.* If we have right apprehenſions of God's *goodneſs,* we can have no temptation to deſpair of his kind and merciful intentions to us, provided we be but careful of our duty to him, and do ſincerely repent and forſake our ſins. Plainer declarations no words can make, than thoſe we meet with in the holy ſcriptures, that *God hath no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live*; that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*; that *he is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance*; that *he that confeſſeth and forſaketh his ſin, ſhall have mercy*; that *if the wicked forſake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, he will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon.*

As for outward calamities and afflictions, the conſideration of God's *goodneſs* is a firm ground of conſolation to us, giving us aſſurance, that God will either prevent them by his providence, or ſupport us under them, or reſcue us out of them, or turn them to our greater good and happineſs in this world, or the next. St. *Paul* ſpeaks of it as the firm belief and perſuaſion of all good men, that, in the iſſue, all their actions ſhould prove to their advantage: *We know* (ſays he) *that all things ſhall work together for good to them that love God.* And one of the greateſt evidences of our love to God, is a firm belief and perſuaſion of his *goodneſs:* If we believe his *goodneſs,* we cannot but love him; and if we *love him, all things ſhall work together for our good.*

And this is a great cordial to thoſe who are under grievous perſecutions and ſufferings, which is the caſe of our brethren in a neighbouring nation, and may come to be ours, God knows how ſoon. But though the malice of men be great, and backed with a power not to be controlled by any viſible means, and therefore likely to continue; yet the *goodneſs* of God is greater than the malice of men, and of a longer duration

This Sermon was preached before the late happy Revolution.

duration and continuance. And thus *David* comforted himſelf when he was perſecuted by *Saul*; *Pſal.* lii. 1. *Why boaſteſt thou thyſelf in miſchief, O mighty man? the goodneſs of God endureth continually.* The perſecution which *Saul* raiſed againſt him was very powerful, and laſted a long time; but he comforts himſelf with this, that *the goodneſs of God endures for ever.*

IV. The conſideration of God's *goodneſs*, is a powerful motive and argument to ſeveral duties.

1. To the love of God. And this is the moſt proper and natural effect and operation of the goodneſs of God upon our minds. Several of the divine attributes are very awful, but *goodneſs* is amiable; and without this, nothing elſe is ſo. Power and wiſdom may command dread and admiration; but nothing but goodneſs can challenge our love and affection. Goodneſs is amiable for itſelf, though no benefit and advantage ſhould from thence redound to us: but when we find the comfortable effects of it, when *the riches of God's goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance* are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodneſs, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for; this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was amiable for itſelf. We cannot but love him who *is good*, and *does* us *good*; whoſe goodneſs extends to all his creatures, but is exerciſed in ſo peculiar a manner towards the ſons of men, that it is called *love*; and if God vouchſafe to love us, well may this be the *firſt and great commandment, Thou ſhall love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind.*

2. The conſideration of God's *goodneſs*, is likewiſe an argument to us fear him; not as a ſlave does his maſter, but as a child does his father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid he is to offend him. *There is forgiveneſs with thee*, (ſaith the Pſalmiſt) *that thou mayeſt be feared:* Becauſe God is ready to forgive, we ſhould be afraid to offend. *Men ſhall fear the Lord, and his goodneſs*, (ſaith the Prophet) *Hoſea* iii. 5. And, indeed, nothing is more to be dreaded, than deſpiſed goodneſs, and abuſed patience, which turns into fury and vengeance: *Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance*, (ſays the Apoſtle) *and treaſureſt up to thyſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?*

3. The conſideration of God's *goodneſs*, is a powerful motive to obedience to his laws, *and* (as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleaſing, being fruitful in every good work.* This argument *Samuel* uſeth to the people of *Iſrael*, to perſuade them to obedience; 1 *Sam.* xii. 24. *Only fear the Lord, and ſerve him in truth with all your heart; for conſider how great things he hath done for you.*

And, indeed, the laws which God hath given us, are none of the leaſt inſtances of his goodneſs to us, ſince they all tend to our good, and are proper cauſes and means of our happineſs: ſo that in challenging our obedience to his laws, as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his laws require of us, is to do that which is beſt for ourſelves, and does moſt directly conduce to our own welfare and happineſs. Conſidering our infinite obligations to God, he might have challenged our obedience to the ſevereſt and harſheſt laws he could have impoſed upon us: ſo that as the ſervants ſaid to *Naaman*, *Had the prophet bid thee to do ſome great thing, wouldeſt thou not have done it? how much more when he hath only ſaid, Waſh and be clean?* If God had required of us things very grievous and burthenſome; in love and gratitude to him, we ought to have yielded a ready and chearful obedience to ſuch commands; how much more when he hath only ſaid, *Do this, and be happy.* In teſtimony of your love to me, do theſe things which are the greateſt kindneſs and benefit to yourſelves.

4. *The goodneſs of God* ſhould *lead men to repentance.* One of the greateſt aggravations of our ſins is, that we offend againſt ſo much goodneſs, and make ſo bad a requital for it; *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O fooliſh people, and unwiſe!* The proper tendency of God's goodneſs and patience to ſinners, is to bring them to a ſenſe of their miſcarriage, and to a reſolution of a better courſe. When we reflect upon the bleſſings and favours of God, and his continual goodneſs to us, can we chuſe but be aſhamed of our terrible ingratitude and diſobedience? Nothing is more apt to make an

ingenious nature to relent, than the ſenſe of undeſerved kindneſs; that God ſhould be ſo *good* to us, who are *evil* and *unthankful* to him; that though we be *enemies* to him, yet *when we hunger, he feeds us*; *when we thirſt, he gives us to drink*; *heaping*, as it were, *coals of fire on our heads*, on purpoſe to melt us into repentance, and *to overcome* our *evil* by his *goodneſs*.

5. The conſideration of God's *goodneſs* is a firm ground of truſt and confidence. What may we not hope and aſſuredly expect from immenſe and boundleſs Goodneſs? If we have right apprehenſions of the goodneſs of God, we cannot poſſibly diſtruſt him, or doubt of the performance of thoſe gracious promiſes which he hath made to us; the ſame Goodneſs which inclined him to make ſuch promiſes, will effectually engage him to make them good. If God be ſo good as he hath declared himſelf, why ſhould we think that he will not help us in our need, and relieve us in our diſtreſs, and comfort us in our afflictions and ſorrows? If we may with confidence rely upon any thing to confer good upon us, and to preſerve and deliver us from evil, we may truſt infinite Goodneſs.

6. The goodneſs of God, is likewiſe an argument to us to patience and contentedneſs with every condition. If the hand of God be ſevere and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be aſſured that it is not without great cauſe that ſo much Goodneſs is ſo highly offended and diſpleaſed with us; that he deſigns our good in all the evils he ſends to us, and does not *chaſten us for his pleaſure, but for our profit*; that we are the cauſe of our own ſufferings, and *our ſins ſeparate between* God *and us, and with-hold good things from us*; that, in the final iſſue and reſult of things, *all things ſhall work together for good* to us; and therefore we ought not to be diſcontented at any thing which will certainly end in our happineſs.

7. Let us imitate the *goodneſs* of God. The higheſt perfection of the beſt and moſt perfect Being is worthy to be our pattern: This the ſcripture frequently propoſeth to us; *Matth.* v. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* How is that? In being good, and kind, and merciful, as God is: *But I ſay unto you*, (ſays our Lord) *love your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you*; *that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil, and on the good, and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt:* And then it follows, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* The ſame pattern St. *Paul* propoſeth to us *Epheſ.* iv. 32. and *chap.* v. 1. *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted*; *forgiving one another, even as God, for Chriſt's ſake, hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love.* We cannot in any thing reſemble God more than in goodneſs, and kindneſs, and mercy, and in a readineſs to forgive thoſe who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this perfection of God, and repreſent it to our minds, that, by the frequent contemplation of it, we may be *transformed into the image of the divine Goodneſs.* Is God ſo good to his creatures? With how much greater reaſon ſhould we be ſo to our fellow-creatures? Is God good to us? Let us imitate his univerſal goodneſs, by endeavouring the good of mankind, and, as much as in us lies, of the whole creation of God. What God is to us, and what we would have him ſtill be to us, that let us be to others. We are infinitely beholden to this perfection of God for all that we are, and for all that we enjoy, and for all that we expect; and therefore we have all the reaſon in the world to admire and imitate it. Let this pattern of the divine Goodneſs be continually before us, that we may be ſtill faſhioning ourſelves in the temper of our minds, and in the actions of our lives, to a likeneſs and conformity to it.

Laſtly, The conſideration of the divine *Goodneſs*, ſhould excite our praiſe and thankfulneſs: This is a great duty, to the performance whereof we ſhould ſummon all the powers and faculties of our ſouls; as the holy Pſalmiſt does, *Pſal.* ciii. i. 2. *Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul*; *and all that is within me, bleſs his holy name. Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits.* And we ſhould invite all others to the ſame work, as the ſame devout Pſalmiſt frequently does; *Pſal.* cvi. 1. *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good*; *for his mercy endureth for ever.* And *Pſal.* cvii. 8. *Oh, that men would praiſe the Lord for his goodneſs, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.*

And we had need to be often called upon to this duty, to which we have a peculiar backwardneſs. Neceſſity drives us to prayer, and ſends us to God for the ſupply of our wants; but praiſe and thankſgiving is a duty which depends upon our gratitude and ingenuity; and nothing ſooner wears off, than the ſenſe of kindneſs and benefits. We are very apt to forget the bleſſings of God, not ſo much from a bad memory, as from a bad nature; to forget the greateſt bleſſings, the continuance whereof ſhould continually put us in mind of them, the bleſſings of our beings. So God complains of his people, *Deut.* xxxii. 18. *Of the God that formed thee thou haſt been unmindful:* The dignity and excellency of our being above all the creatures of this viſible world; *Job* xxxv. 10, 11. *None ſaith, Where is God my maker, who teacheth us more than the beaſts of the earth, and maketh us wiſer than the fowls of heaven*; the daily comforts and bleſſings of our lives, which we can continually receive, without almoſt ever looking up to the hand that gives them. So God complains by the Prophet *Hoſea*, chap. ii. 8. *She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her ſilver and gold.* And is it not ſhameful to ſee how at the moſt plentiful tables, the giving of God thanks is almoſt grown out of faſhion? as if men were aſhamed to own from whence theſe bleſſings came. When thanks is all God expects from us, can we not afford to give him that? *Do ye thus requite the Lord, fooliſh people, and unwiſe?* It is juſt with God to take away his bleſſings from us, if we deny him this eaſy tribute of praiſe and thankſgiving.

It is a ſign men are unfit for heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper work and employment of the bleſſed ſpirits above: Therefore, as ever we hope to come thither, let us begin this work here, and inure ourſelves to that which will be the great buſineſs of all eternity: Let us, with *the four and twenty elders* in the *Revelation*, *fall down before him that ſits on the throne, and worſhip him that liveth for ever and ever, and caſt our crowns before the throne,* (that is, caſt ourſelves) and aſcribe all glory to God, ſaying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou haſt made all things, and for thy pleaſure they are, and were created:*

To him therefore, the infinite and inexhauſtible fountain of goodneſs, the Father of mercies, and the God of all conſolation, who gave us ſuch excellent beings, having made us little lower than the angels, and crowned us with glory and honour, who hath been pleaſed to ſtamp upon us the image of his own goodneſs, and thereby made us partakers of a divine nature, communicating to us not only of the effects of his goodneſs, but in ſome meaſure and degree, of the perfection itſelf; To Him who gives us all things richly to enjoy which pertain to life and godlineſs, and hath made ſuch abundant proviſion not only for our comfort and convenience in this preſent life, but for our unſpeakable happineſs to all eternity; To Him who deſigned this happineſs to us from all eternity, and whoſe mercy and goodneſs to us endures for ever, who when by wilful tranſgreſſions and diſobedience we had plunged ourſelves into a ſtate of ſin and miſery, and had forfeited that happineſs which we were deſign'd to, was pleaſed to reſtore us to a new capacity of it, by ſending his only Son to take our nature, with the miſeries and infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for us; in a word, To Him who is infinitely good to us, not only contrary to our deſerts, but beyond our hopes, who renews his mercy upon us every morning, and is patient though we provoke him every day, who preſerves and provides for us, and ſpares us continually, who is always willing, always watchful, and never weary to do us good; To Him be all glory and honour, adoration and praiſe, love and obedience now and for ever. 2

SERMON XCIV.

The Mercy of God.

NUMB. XIV. 18.

The Lord is long-ſuffering, and of great mercy.

I HAVE conſidered God's *goodneſs* in general. There are two eminent branches of it, his *patience* and *mercy*. The patience of God, is his goodneſs to them that are guilty, in deferring or moderating their deſerved puniſhment: The mercy of God, is his goodneſs to them that are, or may be miſerable. It is the laſt of theſe two I deſign to diſcourſe of at this time; in doing of which I ſhall enquire,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the *mercy* of God.

Secondly, Shew you, that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Conſider the degree of it, that God is of *great mercy*.

Firſt. What we are to underſtand by the *mercy* of God.

I told you, It is his goodneſs to them that are in miſery, or liable to it; that is, that are in danger of it, or have deſerved it. It is mercy, to prevent the miſery that we are liable to, and which may befal us, though it be not actually upon us. It is mercy to defer the miſery that we deſerve, or mitigate it; and this is, properly, patience, and forbearance. It is mercy, to relieve thoſe that are in miſery, to ſupport or comfort them. It is mercy, to remit the miſery we deſerve, and, by pardon and forgiveneſs, to remove and take away the obligation to puniſhment.

Thus the mercy of God is uſually, in ſcripture, ſet forth to us, by the affection of pity and compaſſion; which is an affection that cauſeth a ſenſible commotion and diſturbance in us, upon the apprehenſion of ſome great evil that lies upon another, or hangs over him. Hence it is that God is ſaid, in ſcripture, to be *grieved* and *afflicted* for the miſeries of men; *his bowels* are ſaid *to ſound*, and *his heart to turn within him*. But though God is pleaſed in this manner to ſet forth his mercy and tenderneſs towards us, yet we muſt take heed how we cloath the divine nature with the infirmities of human paſſions. We muſt not meaſure the perfection of God by the expreſſions of his condeſcention; and becauſe he ſtoops to our weakneſs, level him to our infirmities. When God is ſaid to pity us, we muſt take away the imperfection of his paſſion, the commotion and diſturbance of it, and not imagine any ſuch thing in God; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compaſſion of God, without producing the diſquiet, do produce the effects of the moſt ſenſible pity.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God.

All the arguments that I uſed to prove the *goodneſs* of God, from the acknowledgment of natural light, and from ſcripture and reaſon, ſerve to prove that he is *merciful*; becauſe the mercy of God is an eminent branch of his *goodneſs*. I will only produce ſome of thoſe many Texts of ſcripture which attribute this perfection to God. *Exod.* xxxiv. 6. *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious.* Deut. iv. 31. *The Lord thy God is a merciful God.* 2 Chron. xxxiv. 9. *The Lord your God is gracious and merciful.* Nehem. ix. 17. *Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful.* Pſal. xxv. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy.* Pſal. lxii. 12. *Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.* Pſal. ciii. 8. *Merciful and gracious.* Pſal. cxxx. 7. *With the Lord there is mercy.* And ſo *Jer.* iii. 12. *Joel* ii. 13. *Jonah* iv. 2. *Luke* vi. 36. *Be ye thereſore merciful, as your Father alſo is merciful.* The ſcripture ſpeaks of this as moſt natural to him; 2 *Cor.* i. 3. he is called *the Father of mercies.* But when he puniſheth, he doth, as it were, relinquiſh his nature, and do a *ſtrange work. The Lord will wait, that he may be gracious,* Iſa. xxx. 18. God paſſeth by opportunities of puniſhing, but his mercy takes opportunity to diſplay itſelf: *He waits to be gracious.* To afflict or puniſh, is a work that God is unwilling to do, that he takes no pleaſure in; *Lam.* iii. 33. *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* But mercy is a work that he delights in; *Micah* vii. 18. *He delighteth in mercy.* When God ſhews mercy, he does it with pleaſure and delight; he is ſaid *to rejoice over his people, to do them good.* Thoſe attributes that declare God's goodneſs, as when he is ſaid to be gracious, or merciful, and long-ſuffering, they ſhew what God is in himſelf, and delights to be: thoſe which declare his wrath and ſeverity, ſhew what he is upon provocation, and the occaſion of ſin; not what he chuſeth to be, but what we do, as it were, compel and neceſſitate him to be.

Thirdly, For the degree of it; That God is a God of *great mercy.*

The ſcripture doth delight to advance the mercy of God, and does uſe great variety of expreſſion to magnify it: It ſpeaks of the greatneſs of his mercy; *Numb.* xiv. 19. *According unto the greatneſs of thy mercy.* 2 *Sam.* xxiv. 14. *Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great.* It is called an abundant mercy; 1 *Pet.* i. 3. *According to his abundant mercy. Pſal.* ciii. 8. he is ſaid to be *plenteous in mercy*; and *rich in mercy,* Eph. ii. 4. *Pſal.* v. 6. he ſpeaks of *the multitude of God's mercies*; and of the variety of them, *Nehem.* ix. 19. *In thy manifold mercies thou forſakeſt them not.* So many are they, that we are ſaid to be ſurrounded and compaſſed about on every ſide with them; *Pſal.* ciii. 4. *Who crowneth thee with loving kindneſs, and tender mercies.*

And yet further to ſet forth the greatneſs of them, the ſcripture uſeth all dimenſions. Height; *Pſalm.* lvii. 10. *Thy mercy is great unto the heavens.* Nay, higher yet; *Pſal.* cviii. 4. *Thy mercy is great above the heavens.* For the latitude and extent of it, it is as large as the earth and extends to all the creatures in it; *Pſal.* cxix. 64. *The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy. Pſal.* cxlv. 9. *His tender mercies are over all his works.* For the length, or duration and continuance of it; *Exod.* xxxiv. 7. *Laying up mercy in ſtore for thouſands of generations,* one after another. Nay, it is of a longer continuance; *Pſal.* cxviii. it is ſeveral times repeated, that *his mercy endureth for ever.*

And to ſhew the intenſe degree of this affection of mercy or pity, the ſcripture uſeth ſeveral emphatical expreſſions to ſet it forth to us. The ſcripture ſpeaks of the tender mercies of God; *Pſal.* xxv. 6. *Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies.* Yea, of the multitude of theſe; *Pſal.* li. 1. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my tranſgreſſions.* Jam. v. 11. *The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.* They are called God's bowels, which are the tendereſt parts, and apt to yern and ſtir in us when any affections of love and pity are excited; *Iſa.* lxiii. 15. *Where is the ſounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? are they reſtrained?* Luke i. 78. *Through the tender mercy of our God*; ſo it is in our tranſlation: but if we render it from the original, it is, *through the bowels of the mercies of our God.* How doth God condeſcend, in thoſe pathetical expreſſions which he uſeth concerning his people? *Hoſ.* xi. 8. *How ſhall I give thee up, Ephraim? how ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? how ſhall I make thee as Admah? how ſhall I ſet thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* Nay, to expreſs his tender ſenſe of our miſeries and ſufferings, he is repreſented as being afflicted with us, and bearing a part in our ſufferings; *Iſa.* lxiii. 9. *In all their afflictions he was afflicted.*

The compaſſions of God, are compared to the tendereſt affections among men: to that of a father towards his children; *Pſal.* ciii. 13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* Nay, to the compaſſions of a mother towards her infant; *Iſa.* xlix. 15. *Can a woman forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion on the ſon of her womb?* Yea, ſhe may, it is poſſible, though moſt unlikely: but though a mother may turn unnatural, yet God cannot be unmerciful.

In ſhort, the ſcripture doth every-where magnify the mercy of God, and ſpeak of it with all poſſible advantage; as if the divine nature, which doth in all perfections excel all others, did in this excel itſelf. The ſcripture ſpeaks of it as if God was wholly taken up with it, as if it was his conſtant exerciſe and employment, ſo that, in compariſon of it, he doth hardly diſplay any other excellency; *Pſal.* xxv. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy*; as if, in this world, God had a deſign to advance his mercy above his other attributes. The mercy of God is now in the throne; this is the day of mercy; and God doth diſplay it, many times, with a ſeeming diſhonour to his other attributes, his juſtice, and holineſs, and truth. *His Juſtice*; this makes *Job* complain of the long life and proſperity of the wicked; *Job* xxi. 7. *Wherefore do the wicked live, yea, become old?* &c. *His holineſs*; this makes the Prophet expoſtulate with God, *Habak.* i. 13. *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canſt not look on iniquity: Wherefore lookeſt thou upon them that deal treacherouſly, and holdeſt thy tongue?* &c. And *the truth* of God, this makes *Jonah* complain, as if God's mercies were ſuch as did make ſome reflection upon his truth, *Jonah* iv. 2.

But that we may have more diſtinct apprehenſions of the greatneſs and number of God's mercies, I will diſtribute them into kinds, and rank them under ſeveral heads. It is mercy, to prevent thoſe evils and miſeries that we are liable to: It is mercy, to defer thoſe evils that we have deſerved, or to mitigate them: It is mercy, to ſupport and comfort us when miſery is upon us: It is mercy, to deliver us from them: But the greateſt mercy of all is, to remit the evil and miſery we have deſerved, by pardon and forgiveneſs, to remove and take away the obligation to puniſhment. So that the mercy of God may be reduced to theſe *five* heads:

I. Preventing mercy. Many evils and miſeries which we are liable to, God prevents them at a great diſtance; and when they are coming towards us, he ſtops them, or turns them another way. The merciful providence of God, and thoſe inviſible guards which protect us, do divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We ſeldom take notice of God's preventing mercy; we are not apt to be ſenſible how great a mercy it is to be freed from thoſe ſtraits and neceſſities, thoſe pains and diſeaſes of body, thoſe inward racks and horrors which others are preſſed withal, and labour under. When any evil or miſery is upon us, would we not reckon it a mercy to be reſcued and delivered from it? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it? Does not that man owe more to his phyſician, who prevents his ſickneſs and diſtemper, than he who, after the weakneſs and languiſhing, the pains and tortures of ſeveral months, is at length cured by him?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the patience of God, which conſiſts in the deferring or moderating of our deſerved puniſhment. Hence it is, that *ſlow to anger, and of great mercy*, do ſo often go together. But this I ſhall ſpeak to hereafter in ſome particular diſcourſes.

III. Comforting mercy. 2 *Cor.* i. 3. *The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.* The ſcripture repreſents God as very merciful, in comforting and ſupporting thoſe that are afflicted and caſt down: Hence are thoſe expreſſions of *putting his arms under us*; *bearing us up*; *ſpeaking comfortably*; *viſiting us with his loving-kindneſs*: which ſignify God's merciful regard to thoſe who are in miſery and diſtreſs.

IV. His relieving mercy, in ſupplying thoſe that are in want, and delivering thoſe that are in trouble. God doth, many times, exerciſe men with trouble and afflictions, with a very gracious and merciful deſign, to prevent greater evils, which men would otherwiſe bring upon themſelves. Afflictions are a merciful invention of heaven to do us that good, which nothing elſe can; they awaken us to a ſenſe of God, and of ourſelves, to a conſideration of the evil of our ways; they make us to take notice of God, to ſeek him, and enquire after him. God doth, as it were, by afflictions, throw men upon their backs, to make them look up to heaven. *Hoſ.* v. 15. *In their affliction they will ſeek me early.* *Pſal.* lxxviii. 34. *When he ſlew them, then they ſought him, and they returned and enquired early after God.* But God does not delight in this; *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* When afflictions have accompliſhed their work, and obtained their end upon us, God is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us; *Iſa.* liv. 7, 8. *For a ſmall moment have I forſaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlaſting kindneſs will I have mercy on thee, ſaith the Lord thy redeemer,*

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatneſs and fulneſs of God's mercy appears, becauſe our ſins are great: *Pſal.* lxxviii. 38. *Being full of compaſſion, he forgave their iniquity.* And the multitude of God's mercies becauſe our ſins are many; *Pſal.* li. 1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindneſs; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my tranſgreſſions.* *Exod.* xxxiv. 7. he is ſaid *to pardon iniquity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin.* How manifold are his mercies, to forgive all our ſins, of what kind ſoever! The mercy of God to us in pardoning our ſins, is matter of aſtoniſhment and admiration; *Mic.* vii. 18. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity!* But eſpecially if we conſider by what means our pardon is procured; by transferring our guilt upon the moſt innocent perſon, the Son of God, and making him *to bear our iniquities*, and to ſuffer the wrath of God which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of God's mercy appears in this diſpenſation; this ſhews *the riches of his grace*, that he ſhould be at ſo much coſt to purchaſe our pardon; *Not with corruptible things, as ſilver and gold, but with the precious blood of his own Son*, Eph. i. 6, 7. *To the praiſe of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveneſs of ſins, according to the riches of his grace.*

Having diſpatched the *three* particulars I propoſed to be ſpoken to, I ſhall ſhew what uſe we ought to make of this divine attribute.

Uſe 1. We ought with thankfulneſs to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of God to us. Let us view it in all its dimenſions; the height, and length, and breadth of it: in all the variety and kinds of it; the preventing mercy of God to many of us. Thoſe miſeries that lie upon others, it is mercy to us that we eſcaped them. It is mercy that ſpares us: *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not conſumed, and becauſe his compaſſions fail not.* It is mercy that mitigates our puniſhment, and makes it fall below the deſert of our ſins. It is mercy that comforts and ſupports us under any of thoſe evils that lie upon us, and that reſcues and delivers us from them: Which way ſoever we look, we are incompaſſed with the mercies of God; they *compaſs us about on every ſide; we are crowned with loving kindneſs, and tender mercies.* It is mercy that feeds us, and cloaths us, and that preſerves us. But, above all, we ſhould thankfully acknowledge and admire the pardoning mercy of God; *Pſal*, ciii. 1, 2, 3. where *David* does, as it were, muſter up the mercies of God, and make a catalogue of them; he ſets the pardoning mercy in the front; *Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and all that is within me bleſs his holy name. Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities.*

If we look into ourſelves, and conſider our own temper and diſpoſition, how void of pity and bowels we are, how cruel, and hard hearted, and inſolent, and revengeful; if we look abroad into the world, and ſee how *full the earth is of the habitations of cruelty*, we ſhall admire the mercy of God more, and think ourſelves more beholden to it. How many things muſt concur to make our hearts tender, and melt our ſpirits, and ſtir our bowels, to make us pitiful and compaſſionate? We ſeldom pity any, unleſs they be actually in miſery; nor all ſuch neither, unleſs the miſery they lie under be very great; nor then neither, unleſs the perſon that ſuffers be nearly related, and we be ſome ways concerned in his ſufferings; yea, many times not then neither upon a generous account, but as we are ſome ways obliged by intereſt and ſelf-love and a dear regard to ourſelves, when we have ſuffered the like ourſelves, and have learned to pity others by our own ſufferings, or when in danger or probability to be in the like condition ourſelves; ſo many motives and obligations are neceſſary to awaken and ſtir up this affection in us. But God is merciful and pitiful to us out of the mere goodneſs of his nature; for few of theſe motives and conſiderations can have any place in him. This affection of pity and tenderneſs is ſtirred up in God by the mere preſence of the object, without any other inducement. The mercy of God, many times, doth not ſtay 'till we be actually miſerable, but looks forward a great way, and pities us at a great diſtance, and prevents our miſery. God doth not only pity us in great calamities, but conſiders thoſe leſſer evils that are upon us. God is merciful to us, when we have deſerved all the evils that are upon us; and far greater, when we are *leſs than the leaſt of all his mercies*, when we deſerved all the miſery that is upon us, and have with violent hands pulled it upon our own heads, and have been the authors and procurers of it to ourſelves. Though God, in reſpect of his nature, be at an infinite diſtance from us; yet his mercy is near to us, and he cannot poſſibly have any ſelf-intereſt in it. The divine nature is not liable to want, or injury, or ſuffering; he is ſecure of his own happineſs and fulneſs, and can neither wiſh the enlargement, nor fear the impairment of his eſtate; he can never ſtand in need of pity or relief from us, or any other, and yet he pities us.

Now if we conſider the vaſt difference of this affection in God and us, how tender his mercies are, and how ſenſible his bowels; and yet we who have ſo many arguments to move us to pity, how hard our hearts are, and how unapt to relent, as if we were *born of the rock*, and were *the off-ſpring of the nether mill-ſtone:* Sure, when we duly conſider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of God.

How cruel are we to creatures below us! with how little remorſe can we kill a flea, or tread upon a worm? partly becauſe we are ſecure that they cannot hurt us, nor revenge themſelves upon us; and partly becauſe they are ſo deſpicable in our eyes, and ſo far below us, that they do not fall under the conſideration of our pity. Look upward, proud man! and take notice of him who is above thee: Thou didſt not make the creatures below thee, as God did; there's but a finite diſtance between thee and the meaneſt creatures; but there's an infinite diſtance between thee and God. Man is a name of dignity, when we compare ourſelves with other creatures; but compared to God, *we are worms, and not men*; yea, we are *nothing*, yea, *leſs than nothing, and vanity.* How great then is the mercy of God, which regards us, who are ſo far below him, which takes into conſideration ſuch inconſiderable nothings as we are! We may ſay with *David*, Pſal. viii. 4. *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt him?* and with *Job*, chap. vii. 17. *What is man, that thou ſhouldeſt magnify him, and that thou ſhouldeſt ſet thine heart upon him?*

And then how hard do we find it to forgive thoſe who have injured us? If any one have offended, or provoked us, how hard are we to be reconciled? how mindful of an injury? how do anger and revenge boil within us? how do we upbraid men with their faults? what vile and low ſubmiſſion do we require of them, before we will receive them into favour, and grant them peace? And if we forgive once, we think that is much; but if an offence and provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the diſciples of our Saviour, after he had ſo emphatically taught them forgiveneſs, in the petition of the *Lord's Prayer*, yet they had very narrow ſpirits as to this; *Matth.* xviii. 21. *Peter* comes to him, and aſks him, *How often ſhall my brother ſin againſt me, and I forgive him? 'till ſeven times?* He thought that was much: And yet we have great obligations to pardoning and forgiving others, becauſe we are obnoxious to God, and one another: we ſhall many times ſtand in need of pardon from God and men; and it may be our own caſe; and when it is, we are too apt to be very indulgent to ourſelves, and conceive good hopes of the mercy of others; we would have our ignorance, and inadvertencies, and miſtakes, and all occaſions, and temptations, and provocations conſidered; and when we have done amiſs, upon ſubmiſſion, and acknowledgment of our fault, we would be received into favour: But God, who is not at all liable to us, how ready is he to forgive! If we confeſs our ſins to him, he is merciful to forgive: He pardons freely; and ſuch are the condeſcenſions of his mercy, though he be the party offended, yet he offers pardon to us, and beſeeches us to be reconciled: if we do but come towards him, he runs to meet us, as in the parable of the prodigal, *Luke* xv. 20. What reaſon have we then thankfully to acknowledge and admire the mercy of God to us?

Uſe 2. The great mercy of God to us, ſhould ſtir up in us ſhame and ſorrow for ſin. The judgments of God may break us; but the conſideration of God's mercy, ſhould rather melt and diſſolve us into tears: *Luke* vii. 47. the woman that waſhed Chriſt's feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair, the account that our Saviour gives of the great affection that ſhe expreſſed to him, was, *ſhe loved much, becauſe much was forgiven her*; and ſhe grieved much, becauſe much was forgiven her.

Eſpecially we ſhould ſorrow for thoſe ſins which have been committed by us after God's mercies received. Mercies after ſins ſhould touch our hearts, and make us relent: It ſhould grieve us that we ſhould offend and provoke a God ſo gracious and merciful, ſo ſlow to anger, and ſo ready to forgive: But ſin againſt mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greateſt aggravations of ſin. And as mercy raiſes the guilt of our ſins, ſo it ſhould raiſe our ſorrow for them. No conſideration is more apt to work upon human nature, than that of kindneſs; and the greater mercy has been ſhewed to us, the greater our ſins, and the greater cauſe of ſorrow for them; contraries do illuſtrate, and ſet off one another; in the great goodneſs and mercy of God to us, we ſee the great evil of our ſins againſt him.

Every ſin has the nature of rebellion and diſobedience; but ſins againſt mercy have ingratitude in them. Whenever we break the laws of God, we rebel againſt our Sovereign; but as we ſin againſt the mercies of God, we injure our benefactor. This makes our ſin to be horrid, and aſtoniſhing; *Iſa.* i. 2. *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath ſpoken, I have nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt me.* All the mercies of God are aggravations of our ſins; 2 *Sam.* xii. 7, 8, 9. *And Nathan ſaid to David, Thou art the man. Thus ſaith the Lord God of Iſrael, I anointed thee king over Iſrael, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul: And I gave thee thy maſter's houſe, and thy maſter's wives into thy boſom, and gave thee the houſe of Iſrael and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee ſuch and ſuch things. Wherefore haſt thou deſpiſed the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his ſight?* God reckons up all his mercies, and from them aggravates *David*'s ſin; 1 *Kings* xi. 9. he takes notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his mercy: And it is the worſt temper in the world, not to be wrought upon by kindneſs, not to be melted by mercy: No greater evidence of a wicked heart, than that the mercies of God have no effect upon it; *Iſa.* xxvi. 10. *Let favour be ſhewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteouſneſs.*

Uſe. 3. Let us imitate the merciful nature of God. This branch of God's goodneſs is very proper for our imitation. The general exhortation of our Saviour, *Matth.* v. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*; is more particularly expreſſed by St. *Luke*, chap. vi. 36. *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father alſo is merciful.* Men affect to make images, and impoſſible repreſentations of God; but, as *Seneca* ſaith, *Crede Deos, cum propitii eſſent, fictiles fuiſſe.* We may draw this image and likeneſs of God; we may be gracious and merciful as he is. Chriſt, who was *the expreſs image of his Father*, his whole life and undertaking was a continued work of mercy; *he went about doing good* to the ſouls of men, by preaching the goſpel to them; and to the bodies of men, in healing all manner of diſeaſes: There is nothing that he recommends more to us, in his goſpel, than this ſpirit and temper; *Matth.* v. 7. *Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.* How many parables doth he uſe, to ſet forth the mercy of God to us, with a deſign to draw us to the imitation of it? The parable of the prodigal; of the good *Samaritan*; of the ſervant to whom he forgave ten thouſand talents. We ſhould imitate God in this, in being tender and compaſſionate to thoſe that are in miſery.

This is a piece of natural, indiſpenſible religion, to which poſitive and inſtituted religion muſt give way. *Hoſea* vi. 6. *I deſired mercy, and not ſacrifice*; which is twice cited and uſed by our Saviour. *Micah* vi. 8. *He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what it is that the Lord thy God requires of thee; to do juſtice, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*

This is always one part of the deſcription of a good man, that he is apt to pity the miſeries and neceſſities of others; *Pſal.* xxxvii. 26. *He is ever merciful, and lendeth.* He is far from cruelty, not only to men, but even to the brute creatures; *Prov.* xii. 10. *A righteous man regardeth the life of his beaſt.* There is nothing more contrary to the nature of God, than a cruel and ſavage diſpoſition, not to be affected with the miſeries and ſufferings of others: How unlike is this to *the Father of mercies, and the God of conſolation!* When we can ſee cruelty exerciſed, and our bowels not to be ſtirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked; how unlike is this to God, who is *very pitiful, and of tender mercies!* But to rejoice at the miſeries of others, this is inhuman and barbarous. Hear how God threatens *Edom* for rejoycing at the miſeries of his brother *Jacob, Obad.* ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. But to delight to make others miſerable, and to aggravate their ſufferings; this is deviliſh, this is the temper of hell, and the very ſpirit of the deſtroyer.

It becomes man, above all other creatures, to be merciful, who hath had ſuch ample and happy experience of God's mercy to him, and doth ſtill continually ſtand in need of mercy from God. God hath been very merciful to us. Had it not been for the tender mercies of God to us, we had all of us long ſince been miſerable. Now as we have received mercy from God, we ſhould ſhew it to others. The Apoſtle uſeth this as an argument why we ſhould relieve thoſe that are in miſery and want, becauſe we have had ſuch experience of the mercy and love of God to us; 1 *John* iii. 16, 17. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, becauſe he laid down his life for us. But whoſo hath this world's good, and ſeeth his brother have need*, &c. *how dwelleth the love of God in him?* That man hath no ſenſe of the mercy of God abiding upon his heart, that is not merciful to his brother. And it is an argument why we ſhould forgive one another; *Eph.* iv. 32. *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven you.* Chap. v. 1. *Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.* *Col.* iii. 12, 13. *Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel againſt any: even as Chriſt forgave you, ſo alſo do ye.*

And we continually ſtand in need of mercy both from God and man. We are liable one to another, and in the change of human affairs, we may be all ſubject to one another by turns, and ſtand in need of one another's pity and compaſſion; and we muſt expect, that *with what meaſure we mete to others, with the ſame it ſhall be meaſured to us again.* To reſtrain the cruelties, and check the inſolences of men, God has ſo ordered, in his providence, that very often, in this world, mens cruelties *return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates. Bajazet* meets with a *Tamerlane.*

But if men were not thus liable to one another, we all ſtand in need of mercy from God. If we be merciful to others in ſuffering, and forgiving them that have injured us, God will be ſo to us, he will pardon our ſins to us: *Prov.* xvi. 6. *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.* 2 Sam. xxii. 26. *With the merciful thou wilt ſhew thyſelf merciful.* Prov. xiv. 21. *He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.* Prov. xxi. 21. *He that followeth after righteouſneſs and mercy, findeth life.* Matth. vi. 14. *If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you.* But, on the other hand, if we be malicious and revengeful, and implacable to thoſe that have offended us, and inexorable to thoſe who deſire to be received to favour, and cruel to thoſe who lie at our mercy, hard-hearted to them that are in neceſſity; what can we expect, but that the mercy of God will leave us, that he will *forget to be gracious, and ſhut up in anger his tender mercy.* Matth. vi. 15. *If ye forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will your Father forgive your treſpaſſes.* That is a dreadful paſſage, St. *James* ii. 13. *He ſhall have judgment without mercy, that hath ſhewed no mercy.* How angry is the Lord with the ſervant who was ſo inexorable to his fellow-ſervant, after he had forgiven him ſo great a debt, as you find in the parable, *Matth.* xviii. 24. he owed him ten thouſand talents, and, upon his ſubmiſſion and entreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compaſſion, and looſed him, and forgave him all: But no ſooner had this favour been done to him by his Lord, but, going forth, he meets his fellow-ſervant, who owed a ſmall, inconſiderable debt, an hundred pence; he lays hands on him and takes him by the throat, and roundly demands payment of him: He falls down at his feet, and uſeth the ſame form of ſupplication that he had uſed to his Lord; but he rejects his requeſt, and puts him in priſon. Now what ſaith the Lord to him; *ver.* 32, 33, 34. *O thou wicked ſervant, I forgave thee all that debt, becauſe thou deſiredſt me: Shouldeſt not thou alſo have had compaſſion on thy fellow-ſervant, even as I had pity on thee? And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, 'till he ſhould pay all that was due unto him.* Now what application doth our Saviour make of this? *ver.* 35. *So likewiſe ſhall my heavenly Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their treſpaſſes.*

God's readineſs to forgive us, ſhould be a powerful motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greateſt injuries that we can ſuffer from men, if we compare them to the ſins that we commit againſt God, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as *an hundred pence to ten thouſand talents.* If we would be like God, we ſhould forgive the greateſt injuries; he pardoneth our ſins, though they be exceeding great; many injuries, though offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied: For ſo God doth to us; *He pardoneth iniquity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin*, Exod. xxxiv. 7. *Iſa.* lv. 7. *He will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon.* We would not have God only to forgive us *ſeven times*,

but

but *ſeventy times ſeven*, as often as we offend him; ſo ſhould we forgive our brother.

And we ſhould not be backward to this work; God is *ready to forgive us, Nehem.* ix. 17. And we ſhould do it heartily; not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts, and while we ſay we forgive, carry on a ſecret deſign in our hearts of revenging ourſelves when we have opportunity: but we ſhould *from our hearts forgive every one*; for ſo God doth to us, who when he forgives us, *caſts our iniquities behind his back, and throws them into the bottom of the ſea, and blots out our tranſgreſſion, ſo as to remember our iniquity no more.*

If we do not thus, every time we put up the petition to God, *Forgive us our treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us*, we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a prayer, but a dreadful imprecation againſt ourſelves; we pronounce the ſentence of our own condemnation, and importune God not to forgive us.

Uſe 4. If the mercy of God be ſo great, this may comfort us againſt deſpair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they conſider their unworthineſs, the nature and number of their ſins, and the many heavy aggravations of them, they are apt to ſay, with *Cain*, that *their ſin is greater than can be forgiven*. But do not look only upon thy ſins, but upon the mercies of God. Thou canſt not be too ſenſible of the evil of ſin, and of the deſert of it; but whilſt we aggravate our ſins, we muſt not leſſen the mercies of God. When we conſider the multitude of our ſins, we muſt conſider alſo the multitude of God's tender mercies: we have been great ſinners, and God is of great mercy; we have multiplyed our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon.

Do but thou put thyſelf in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy ſins, and forſaking of them, and thou haſt no reaſon to doubt but the mercy of God will receive thee; *If we confeſs our ſins, he is merciful and faithful to forgive them.* If we had offended man, as we have done God, we might deſpair of pardon; but it is *God* and not *man*, that we have to deal with; and *his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: but as the heavens are high above the earth, ſo are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.*

We cannot be more injurious to God, than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and, when we have provoked him, he were not to be appeaſed and reconciled to us. We diſparage the goodneſs and truth of God, when we diſtruſt thoſe gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodneſs; if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compaſſionate ſinners, and really deſire their happineſs. Doth not he condeſcend ſo low as to repreſent himſelf afflicted for the miſeries of men, and to rejoyce in the converſion of a ſinner? And ſhall not we believe that he is in good earneſt? Doth Chriſt *weep over* impenitent ſinners, becauſe *they will not know the things of their peace?* And canſt thou think he will not pardon thee, upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that men will undo themſelves, and will not be ſaved? And canſt thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot honour and glorify God more, than by entertaining great thoughts of his mercy. As we are ſaid to glorify God by our repentance, becauſe thereby we acknowledge God's holineſs and juſtice; ſo we glorify him by believing his mercy, becauſe we conceive a right opinion of his goodneſs and truth; we ſet to our ſeal, that God is merciful and true; *Pſal.* cxlvii. 11. it is ſaid, that *God takes pleaſure in them that hope in his mercy.* As he delights in mercy, ſo in our acknowledgments of it; that ſinners ſhould conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou do'ſt ſubmit to the terms of God's mercy, thou haſt no reaſon to deſpair of it: And he that thinks that his ſins are more, or greater than the mercy of God can pardon, muſt think that there may be more evil in the creature than there is goodneſs in God.

Uſe 5. By way of caution againſt the preſumptuous ſinner. If there be any that treſpaſs upon the goodneſs of God, and preſume to encourage themſelves in ſin, upon the hopes of his mercy; let ſuch know, that God is juſt, as well as merciful. A God of all mercy is an idol, ſuch a God as men ſet up in their own imaginations; but not the true God, whom the ſcriptures deſcribe: To ſuch perſons the ſcripture deſcribes him after another manner; *Nahum* i. e. *God is jealous*; *the Lord revengeth, and is furious*; *the Lord will take vengeance on his adverſaries, and reſerveth* *wrath for his enemies.* If any man abuſe the mercy of God, to *the ſtrengthening of himſelf in his own wickedneſs, and bleſs himſelf in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, and add drunkenneſs to thirſt; the Lord will not ſpare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealouſy ſhall ſmoak againſt that man, and all the curſes that are written in this book ſhall lie upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven,* Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

Though it be the nature of God to be merciful, yet the exerciſe of his mercy is regulated by his wiſdom; he will not be merciful to thoſe that deſpiſe his mercy, to thoſe that abuſe it, to thoſe that are reſolved to go on in their ſins to tempt his mercy, and make bold to ſay, *Let us ſin, that grace may abound.* God deſigns his mercy for thoſe that are prepared to receive it; *Iſa.* lv. 7. *Let the wicked forſake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* The mercy of God is an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice; and it is no-where offered to countenance ſin, but to convert the ſinner; and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. God hath no-where ſaid that he will be merciful to thoſe who, upon the ſcore of his mercy, are bold with him, and preſume to offend him; but *the mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him, and keep his covenant, and remember his command-mandments to do them. There is forgiveneſs with him, that he may be feared,* but not *that he may be deſpiſed and affronted.* This is to contradict the very end of God's mercy, which is, *to lead us to repentance,* to engage us to leave our ſins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed then of abuſing the mercy of God: we cannot provoke the juſtice of God more, than by preſuming upon his mercy. This is the time of God's mercy; uſe this opportunity: if thou neglecteſt it, a day of juſtice and vengeance is coming; *Rom.* ii. 4, 5. *Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, not knowing that the goodneſs of God leads to repentance? And treaſureſt up unto thyſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God?* Now is the manifeſtation of God's mercy; but there is a time a coming, when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed againſt thoſe who abuſe his mercy, *not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth to repentance.* To think that the goodneſs of God was intended for any other end than to take us off from ſin, is a groſs and affected ignorance that will ruin us; and they who draw any concluſion from the mercy of God, which may harden them in their ſins, they are ſuch as the prophet ſpeaks of, *Iſa.* xxvii. 11. *A people of no underſtanding, therefore he that made them will not ſave them; and he that formed them, will ſhew them no favour.* Mercy itſelf will rejoice in the ruin of thoſe that abuſe it, and it will aggravate their condemnation. There is no perſon towards whom God will be more ſeverely juſt, than towards ſuch. The juſtice of God, exaſperated and ſet on by his injured and abuſed mercy, like a razor ſet in oil, will have the keener edge, and be the ſharper for its ſmoothneſs. Thoſe that have made the mercy of God their enemy, muſt expect the worſt his juſtice can do unto them.

SERMON XCV.

The Patience of GOD.

2 PET. III. 9.

The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, (as ſome men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.

IN the beginning of this chapter the apoſtle puts the chriſtians, to whom he writes, in mind of the predictions of the ancient prophets, and of the apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour, concerning the general judgment of the world, which by many (and, perhaps, by the apoſtles themſelves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would preſently follow the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*; but he tells them, that before *that*, there would ariſe a certain ſect, or ſort of men, that would deride the expectation of a future judgment, deſigning, probably, the *Carpocratians* (a branch of that large ſect of the *Gnoſticks*) of whom St. *Auſtin* expreſly ſays, "That they denied the reſurrection, and, conſequently, a future judgment." Theſe St. *Peter* calls *ſcoffers*, ver. 3, 4. *Knowing this firſt, that there ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, Where is the promiſe of his coming?* The word is ἐπαγγελία, which ſignifies a *declaration* in general, whether it be by way of *promiſe* or *threatening*. What is become of that *declaration* of Chriſt, ſo frequently repeated in the goſpel, concerning his *coming* to judgment? *For ſince the fathers fell aſleep*, or, *ſaving that the fathers are fallen aſleep*, except only that men die, and one generation ſucceeds another, *all things continue as they were from the creation of the world*; that is, the world continues ſtill as it was from the beginning, and there is no ſign of any ſuch change and alteration as is foretold. To this he anſwers *two* things:

1. That theſe ſcoffers, though they took themſelves to be wits, did betray great ignorance, both of the condition of the world, and of the nature of God: They talked very ignorantly concerning the world, when they ſaid, *All things continued as they were from the creation of it*, when ſo remarkable a change had already happened, as the deſtruction of it by water; and therefore the prediction concerning the deſtruction of it by fire, before the great and terrible day of judgment, was no ways incredible. And they ſhewed themſelves likewiſe very ignorant of the perfection of the divine nature; to which, being eternally the ſame, *a thouſand years, and one day*, are *all one*: And if God make good his word ſome thouſands of years hence, it will make no ſenſible difference concerning his eternal duration; it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end; *ver.* 8. *Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day.* This, it ſeems, was a common ſaying among the *Jews*, to ſignify, that to the eternity of God, no finite duration bears any proportion; and therefore, with regard to eternity, it is all one whether it be a thouſand years, or one day. The Pſalmiſt hath an expreſſion much to the ſame purpoſe, *Pſal.* xc. 4. *For a thouſand years in thy ſight are but as yeſterday, when it is paſt, and as a watch in the night.* And the ſon of *Sirach* likewiſe, *Ecclus.* xviii. 10. *As a drop of water to the ſea, and as a grain of ſand to the ſea-ſhore, ſo are a thouſand years to the days of eternity.*

The like expreſſion we meet with in heathen writers; *To the gods no time is long*, ſaith *Pythagoras*: And *Plutarch*, *The whole ſpace of a man's life, to the gods, is as nothing.* And in his excellent diſcourſe of the ſlowneſs of the divine vengeance,

ance, (the very argument St. *Peter* is here upon) he hath this paſſage, *That, a thouſand, or ten thouſand years, are but as an indiviſible point to an infinite duration.* And therefore, when the judgment is to be eternal, the delay of it though it were for a thouſand years, is an objection of no force, againſt either the certainty, or the terror of it; for, to eternity, all time is equally ſhort; and it matters not when the puniſhment of ſinners begins, if it ſhall never have an end.

2. But becauſe the diſtance between the declaration of a future judgment, and the coming of it, though it be nothing to God, yet it ſeemed long to them; therefore he gives ſuch an account of it, as doth not in the leaſt impeach the truth and faithfulneſs of God, but is a clear argument and demonſtration of his goodneſs. Admitting what they ſaid to be true, that God delays judgment for a great while, yet this gives no ground to conclude that judgment will never be; but it ſhews the great goodneſs of God to ſinners, that he gives them ſo long a ſpace of repentance, that ſo they may prevent the terror of that day, whenever it comes, and eſcape that dreadful ruin, which will certainly overtake, ſooner or later, all impenitent ſinners: *The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe*, that is, as to the declaration which he hath made of a future judgment, *as ſome men count ſlackneſs*; that is, as if the delay of judgment, were an argument it would never come. This is a falſe inference from the delay of puniſhment, and an ill interpretation of the goodneſs of God to ſinners, who bears long with them, and delays judgment, on purpoſe to give men time to repent, and, by repentance to prevent their own eternal ruin: *God is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs; but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall do theſe *three* things:

Firſt, I ſhall conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; *God is long-ſuffering to us-ward.*

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew, That the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no juſt ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impunity, as the *ſcoffers*, here foretold by the Apoſtle, argued, that becauſe our Lord delayeth his coming to judgment ſo long, therefore he would never come; *God is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs.*

Thirdly, I will conſider the true reaſon of God's patience and long-ſuffering towards mankind, which the Apoſtle here gives; *He is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.*

Firſt, I will conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of God towards mankind, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; *God is long-ſuffering to us-ward.* In the handling of this, I ſhall do theſe *three* things;

I. I ſhall ſhew what is meant by the patience and long-ſuffering of God.

II. That this is a perfection of the divine nature.

III. I ſhall give ſome proof and demonſtration of the great patience and long-ſuffering of God to mankind.

I. What is meant by the patience and long-ſuffering of God.

The *Hebrew* word ſignifies one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the New Teſtament it is ſometimes expreſſed by the word ὑπομονὴ, which ſignifies God's forbearance, and patient waiting for our repentance; ſometimes by the word ἀνοχὴ, which ſignifies God's holding in his wrath and reſtraining himſelf from puniſhing; and ſometimes by μακροθυμία, which ſignifies the extent of his patience, his long-ſuffering, and forbearing for a long time the puniſhment due to ſinners.

So that the patience of God is his goodneſs to ſinners, in deferring or moderating the puniſhment due to them for their ſins; the deferring of deſerved puniſhment in whole, or in part, which, if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his *long-ſuffering*; and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the puniſhment due to ſin, is an inſtance likewiſe of God's patience; and not only the deferring and moderating of temporal puniſhment, but the adjourning of the eternal miſery of ſinners, is a principal inſtance of God's patience; ſo that the patience of God takes in all that ſpace of repentance which God affords to ſinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befal ſinners in this life, and are ſhort of cutting them off, and turning them into hell, are comprehended in the patience of God. Whenever God puniſheth, *it is of his great mercy* and patience *that we are not conſumed, and becauſe his compaſſions fail not.* I proceed to the

II^d thing I propoſed, which was to ſhew, That *patience* is a perfection of the divine nature.

It is not neceſſarily due to us, but it is due to the perfection of the divine nature, and eſſentially belongs to it: It is a principal branch of God's goodneſs, which is the higheſt and moſt glorious perfection of all other; and therefore we always find it in ſcripture, in the company of God's milder and ſweeter attributes. When God would give the moſt perfect deſcription of himſelf, and, as he ſays to *Moſes, make all his glory to paſs before* us, he uſually does it by thoſe attributes which declare his goodneſs; and *patience* is always one of them. *Exod.* xxxiv. 6. *The Lord paſſed by before Moſes, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God merciful and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in goodneſs and truth.* Pſal. lxxxvi. 15. *But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compaſſion, and gracious, long-ſuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.* Pſal ciii. 8. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, ſlow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.* And the ſame you find *Pſal.* cxlv. 8. *Jonah* iv. 2. *Joel* ii. 13.

Sometimes, indeed, you find a ſeverer attribute added to theſe, as that *he will by no means clear the guilty*, Exod. xxxiv. 7. But it is always put in the laſt place; to declare to us, that God's goodneſs, and mercy, and patience are his firſt and primary perfections: And it is only when theſe fail, and have no effect upon us, but are abuſed by us, to the encouragement of ourſelves in an impenitent courſe, that his juſtice takes place.

Nay, even among men, it is eſteemed a perfection, to be able to forbear and to reſtrain our anger; paſſion is impotency and folly, but patience is power and wiſdom. *Prov.* xiv. 29. *He that is ſlow to wrath, is of great underſtanding; but he that is haſty of ſpirit, exalteth folly,* Prov. xvi. 32. *He that is ſlow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his ſpirit, than he that taketh a city.* Rom. xii. 21. *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* To be impatient, is *to be overcome*; but to forbear anger and revenge, is a *victory*. Patience is an argument of great power and command of ourſelves; and therefore God himſelf, who is the moſt powerful being, is ſlow to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the power of God, than his patience; that when he is provoked by ſuch vile and deſpicable creatures as we are, he can with-hold his hand from deſtroying us. This is the argument which *Moſes* uſeth, *Numb.* xiv. 17, 18. that the power of God doth ſo eminently appear in his patience; *And now, I beſeech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou haſt ſpoken, ſaying, The Lord is gracious, and long-ſuffering.* And yet power, where it is not reſtrained by wiſdom and goodneſs, is a great temptation to anger; becauſe where there is power, there is ſomething to back it, and make it good: And therefore the Pſalmiſt doth recommend and ſet off the patience of God, from the conſideration of his power; *Pſal.* vii. 11. *God is ſtrong and patient; God is provoked every day: God is ſtrong, and* therefore *patient*; or, he is infinitely patient, notwithſtanding his almighty power to revenge the daily provocations of his creatures.

Among men, anger and weakneſs commonly go together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently obſerved by the ſon of *Sirach*, Ecclus. x. 18. *Pride was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman.* So that anger and impatience is every-where unreaſonable. Where there is power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for Omnipotency: and where their wants power, anger is above it: it is too much for a weak and impotent creature to be angry. Where there is power, anger is needleſs, and of no uſe; and where there is no power, it is vain and to no purpoſe. So that patience is every-where a perfection, both in God and man. I proceed to the

III^d thing I propoſed, which was, To give ſome proof and demonſtration of the great patience and long-ſuffering of God to mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we conſider theſe *two* things:

1. How men deal with God.
2. How, notwithſtanding this, God deals with them.

1. How men deal with God. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we

grieve and weary him with our iniquities, as the expreſſion is in the Prophet, *Iſa.* xliii. 24. *Thou haſt made me to ſerve with thy ſins; thou haſt wearied me with thine iniquities.* Every ſin that we commit, is an affront to the divine Majeſty, and a contempt of his authority: By denying ſubmiſſion to his laws, we queſtion his omnipreſence, and ſay, *Doth God ſee? and is there knowledge in the moſt High?* Or if we acknowledge his omnipreſence, and that he regards what we do, the provocation is ſtill the greater; becauſe then we affront him to his face; we dare his juſtice, and challenge his omnipotency, and *provoke the Lord to jealouſy,* as if *we were ſtronger than he.*

Is not God patient, when *the whole world lies in wickedneſs,* and *the earth is overſpread with violence,* and *is full of the habitations of cruelty?* when *he* who is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,* and is ſo highly offended at the ſins of men, hath yet the patience to look upon *them that deal treacherouſly, and to hold his peace?* when the *wicked perſecutes and devours the man that is more righteous than he?* when even that part of the world which profeſſeth the name of God and Chriſt, do by their vile and abominable lives, *blaſpheme that holy and glorious name whereby they are called.*

Every moment God hath greater injuries done to him, and more affronts put upon him, than were ever offered to all the ſons of men: And, ſurely, provocations are trials of patience, epecially when they are ſo numerous, and ſo heinous; for if offences riſe according to the dignity of the perſon injured, and the meanneſs of him that doth the injury, then no offences are ſo great as thoſe that are committed by *men* againſt *God,* no affronts like to thoſe which are offered to the *divine Majeſty* by the continual provocations of *his creatures.* And is not this an argument of God's patience, that the glorious Majeſty of heaven ſhould bear ſuch multiplied indignities from ſuch vile worms? that he who is the Former of all things, ſhould endure his own creatures to rebel againſt him, and the work of his hands to ſtrike at him? that he who is our great Benefactor, ſhould put up ſuch affronts from thoſe who depend upon his bounty, and are maintained at his charge? that he, *in whoſe hands our breath is,* ſhould ſuffer men to breathe out oaths, and curſes, and blaſphemies againſt him? Surely theſe prove the patience of God to purpoſe, and are equally trials and arguments of it.

2. The patience of God will farther appear, if we conſider how, notwithſtanding all this, God deals with us. He is patient to the whole world, in that he doth not turn us out of being, and *turn the wicked* together *into hell, with all the nations that forget God.* He is patient to the greateſt part of Mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible examples of his juſtice, *that others may hear and fear,* and take warning by them. He is patient to particular perſons, in that, notwithſtanding our daily provocations, he *prevents us daily with the bleſſing* of his goodneſs, prolonging our lives and vouchſafing ſo many favours to us, that, *by this great goodneſs, we may be led to repentance.*

But the patience of God will more illuſtriouſly appear, if we conſider theſe following particulars, which are ſo many evidences and inſtances of it.

1. That God is not obliged to ſpare and forbear us at all. It is patience, that he doth not ſurprize us in the very act of ſin, and let fly at us with a thunder-bolt ſo ſoon as ever we have offended; that the wrath of God doth not fall upon the intemperate perſon, as it did upon the *Iſraelites, while the meat and drink is yet in their mouths;* that a man is not ſtruck dead or mad whilſt he is telling a lie; that the ſoul of the prophane and falſe-ſwearer does not expire with his oaths and perjuries.

2. That God ſpares us, when it is in his power ſo eaſily to ruin us; when he can with one word command us out of being, and by cutting aſunder one little thread, let us drop into hell. If God were diſpoſed to ſeverity, he could deal with us after another manner, and as the expreſſion is in the prophet, *eaſe himſelf of his adverſaries, and be avenged of his enemies.*

3. That God exerciſeth this patience to ſinners, *flagrante bello,* while they are up in arms againſt him, and committing hoſtilities upon him; he bears with us even when we are challenging his juſtice to puniſh us, and provoking his power to deſtroy us.

4. That he is ſo very ſlow and unwilling to puniſh, and to inflict his judgments upon us. As for eternal puniſhments, God defers them a long while, and by all

proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for thoſe temporal judgments which God inflicts upon ſinners, he carries himſelf ſo, that we may plainly ſee all the ſigns of unwillingneſs that can be; he tries to prevent them; he is loth to ſet about this work; and when he does, it is with much reluctance; and then he is eaſily perſwaded and prevailed withal not to do it; and when he does, he does it not rigorouſly, and to extremity; and he is ſoon taken off, after he is engaged in it: All which are great inſtances and evidences of his wonderful patience to ſinners.

(1.) God's unwillingneſs to puniſh, appears, in that he labours to prevent puniſhment; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent ſin, the meritorious cauſe of God's judgments: To this end, he hath threatened it with ſevere puniſhments, that the dread of them may make us afraid to offend; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us *a ſpace of repentance*, and invites us earneſtly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his judgments; he expoſtulates with ſinners, and reaſons the caſe with them, as if he were more concerned not to puniſh, than they are not to be puniſhed: and thus, by his earneſt deſire of our repentance, he ſhews how little he deſires our ruin.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work. *Judgment* is, in ſcripture, called *his ſtrange work*; as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the ſudden. He is repreſented as not prepared for ſuch a work; *Deut.* xxxii. 41. *If I whet my glittering ſword*; as if the inſtruments of puniſhment were not ready for us. Nay, by a ſtrange kind of condeſcenſion to our capacities, and to ſet forth to us the patience of God, and his ſlowneſs to wrath, after the manner of men, he is repreſented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to deſtroy us; *Exod.* xxxiii. 2, 3. where he tells *Moſes*, that he *would ſend an angel before them*; *for I will not go up in the midſt of thee, leſt I conſume thee in the way.*

At works of mercy he is very ready and forward. When *Daniel* prayed for the deliverance of the people of *Iſrael* out of captivity, the angel tells him, that *at the beginning of his ſupplication, the commandment came forth*, to bring him a promiſe of their deliverance. The mercy of God, many times, prevents our prayers, and out-runs our wiſhes and deſires: but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it; he paſſeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that, by our repentance, he will prevent his judgments: *He hearkened and heard,* (ſaith God, in the prophet *Jeremiah*) *but they ſpake not aright*; *no man repented him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, What have I done?* He is repreſented as waiting and liſtening, to hear if any penitent word ſhould drop from them; he gives the ſinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to conſider what he hath done, and ſpace to reaſon himſelf into repentance. For this reaſon the judgments of God do often follow the ſins of men at a great diſtance; otherwiſe he could eaſily make them mend their pace, and *conſume us in a moment.*

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance: *Hoſea* xi. 8. *How ſhall I give thee up, Ephraim*; *how ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* He is repreſented as making many eſſays and offers before he came to it: *Pſal.* cvi. 26. *Many a time lifted he up his hand in the wilderneſs to deſtroy them.* He made as if he would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be ſo ſevere. God with-holds his judgments 'till he is weary of holding in, as the expreſſion is, *Jer.* vi. 11. 'till he can forbear no longer; *Jer.* xliv. 22. *So that the Lord could no longer bear, becauſe of the evil of your doings, and becauſe of the abominations which ye have committed.*

(4.) God is eaſily prevailed upon not to puniſh. When he ſeemed reſolved upon it to deſtroy the murmuring *Iſraelites*, yet how often at the interceſſion of *Moſes*, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to ſpare a very wicked people, appears by the inſtance of *Sodom*, where, if there had been *but ten righteous perſons*, he would not have deſtroyed them for the *ten's ſake*. Yea, when his truth ſeemed to have been pawned, (at leaſt in the apprehenſion of his prophet) yet even then repentance took him off, as in the caſe of *Nineveh*. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! With what joy does he tell the prophet the news of *Ahab's* humiliation! *Seeſt thou how Ahab humbleth himſelf? Becauſe he humbleth himſelf, I will not bring the evil in his days.*

5. When he puniſheth, he does it very ſeldom rigorouſly, and to extremity, not ſo much as we deſerve; *Pſal.* ciii. 10. *He hath not dealt with us after our ſins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.* Nor ſo much as he can, he doth not let looſe the fierceneſs of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath; *Pſal.* lxxviii. 38. *He being full of compaſſion, forgave their iniquity, and deſtroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not ſtir up all his wrath.*

6. After he hath begun to puniſh, and is engaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous inſtance of this, 2 *Sam.* xxiv. when God had ſent three days peſtilence upon *Iſrael*, for *David*'s ſin in numbering the people, and, at the end of the third day, the angel of the Lord had ſtretched forth his hand over *Jeruſalem*, to deſtroy it; upon the prayer of *David*, it is ſaid, that the *Lord repented of the evil, and ſaid to the angel that deſtroyed, It is enough; ſtay now thine hand.* Nay, ſo ready is God to be taken off from this work, that he ſets a high value upon thoſe who ſtand in the gap to turn away his wrath; *Numb.* xxv. 11, 12, 13. *Phinehas the ſon of Eleazar, the ſon of Aaron the prieſt, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Iſrael, (while he was zealous for my ſake among them) that I conſumed not the children of Iſrael in my jealouſy. Wherefore ſay, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace. And he ſhall have it, and his ſeed after him, even the covenant of an everlaſting prieſthood; becauſe he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Iſrael.* That which God values in this action of *Phinehas*, next to his zeal for him, is, that *he turned away his wrath, and made an atonement for the children of Iſrael.*

5. and *laſtly*, The *patience* of God will yet appear with farther advantage, if we conſider ſome eminent and remarkable inſtances of it; which are ſo much the more conſiderable, becauſe they are inſtances not only of God's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many perſons; *The long-ſuffering of God waited in the days of Noah* upon the whole world, as is probably conjectured, for the ſpace of *an hundred and twenty years.* God bore with the people of *Iſrael* in the wilderneſs, after they had tempted him ten times, for the ſpace of forty years; *Acts* xiii. 18. *And about the time of forty years ſuffered he their manners in the wilderneſs.* And this inſtance of God's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want fleſh or water, they were out of patience with God: When *Moſes* was in the mount with God but forty days, they preſently fall to make new gods; they had not the patience of *forty days*, and yet God bore their manners *forty years.* God had ſpared *Nineveh* for ſome ages; and when his patience was even expired, and he ſeems to have paſt a final ſentence upon it, yet he grants a reprieve for *forty days*, that they might ſue out their pardon in that time: and they did ſo; *they turned from their evil ways, and God turned from the evil he ſaid he would do them, and he did it not.*

But the moſt remarkable inſtance of God's long-ſuffering, is to the *Jews*, if we conſider it with all the circumſtances of it; after they had rejected the Son of God, notwithſtanding the purity of his doctrine, and the power of his miracles; after they had unjuſtly condemned, and cruelly *murdered the Lord of life*, yet the patience of God reſpited the ruin of that people forty years.

Beſides all theſe, there are many inſtances of God's patience to particular perſons: but it were endleſs to enumerate theſe; every one of us may be an inſtance to ourſelves of God's long-ſuffering.

I ſhall only add, as a farther advantage to ſet off the patience of God to ſinners, that his forbearauce is ſo great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own ſervants. *Job*, who was ſo patient a man himſelf, thought much at it; *Job* xxi. 7, 8. *Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their ſeed is eſtabliſhed in their ſight with them, and their off-ſpring before their eyes.* *Jonah* challengeth God for it, *chap.* iv. 2. *Was not this my ſaying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarſhiſh; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, ſlow to anger,* &c. *Jonah* had obſerved God to be ſo prone to this, that he was loth to be ſent upon his meſſage, leſt God ſhould diſcredit his prophet, in not being ſo *good* (ſhall I ſay) ſo *ſevere* as his word.

I have done with the firſt thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, *viz.* The great patience and long-ſuffering of God to mankind.

SERMON XCVI.

The Patience of GOD.

2 PET. iii. 9.

The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, (as ſome men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.

I HAVE made entrance into theſe words; in the handling of which, I propoſed to do theſe *three* things:

Firſt, To conſider the patience and long-ſuffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; *God is long-ſuffering to us-ward.*

Secondly, To ſhew, that the patience of God, and the delay of his judgment, is no juſt Ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impunity; *God is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs.*

Thirdly, To conſider the true reaſon of God's patience and long-ſuffering towards mankind; *He is long-ſuffering to us-ward; not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* I have already ſpoken to the

Firſt of theſe, namely, The patience and long-ſuffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature. I proceed now to the

Second thing I propoſed, namely, To ſhew, that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no juſt ground why ſinners ſhould hope for impunity; *God is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs*; that is, as the *ſcoffers*, here mentioned by the apoſtle, did ignorantly and maliciouſly reaſon, that becauſe our Lord delayed his coming to judgment ſo long, therefore he would never come.

There was, indeed, ſome pretence for this objection; becauſe the chriſtians did generally apprehend that the day of judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*; and it ſeems, the diſciples themſelves were of that perſuaſion before our Saviour's death; when our Saviour diſcourſing to them of the deſtruction of the temple, they put theſe two queſtions to him, *Matth.* xxiv. 3. *And as he ſate upon the mount of Olives, the diſciples came unto him privately, ſaying, Tell us when ſhall theſe things be? and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? When ſhall theſe things be?* that is, the things he had been ſpeaking of immediately before, *viz.* the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and the diſſolution of the temple; that is plainly the meaning of the firſt queſtion; to which they ſubjoined another, *And what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?* that is, to judgment, *and of the end of the world?* which, in all probability, was added to the former, becauſe they ſuppoſed that the one was preſently to follow the other, and therefore the ſame anſwer would ſerve them both: And it appears by our Saviour's anſwer, that he was not concerned to rectify them in this miſtake, which might be of good uſe to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the goſpel, ſince there was like to be ſo little time for it; and likewiſe to wean their affections from this world, which they thought to be ſo near an end.

One thing, indeed, our Saviour ſays, which (had they not been prepoſſeſſed with another opinion) does ſufficiently intimate, that there might be a conſiderable ſpace of time betwixt the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem* and the day of judgment; and this we find only in St. *Luke*, chap. xxi. 24. where, ſpeaking of the miſeries and calamities that ſhould come upon the *Jews*, he ſays, *They ſhall fall by the edge of the ſword, and be carried into captivity into all nations; and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* So that here were a great many events foretold, betwixt the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem* and the end of the world, the accompliſhment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the event of things; *Jeruſalem* being at this day ſtill *trodden down by the Gentiles*, and the *Jews* ſtill continuing *diſperſed over the world*: but the diſciples, it ſeems, did not much mind this, being carried away with a prejudicate conceit, that the end of the world would happen before the end of that age; in which they were much confirmed by what our Saviour, after his reſurrection, ſaid of St. *John*, upon occaſion of *Peter*'s queſtion concerning him, *John* xxi. 21, 22. *Lord, what ſhall this man do? Jeſus ſaith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Upon which words of our Saviour concerning him, St. *John* himſelf adds, *ver.* 23. *Then went this ſaying abroad among the brethren, That that diſciple ſhould not die*; that is, That he ſhould live 'till the coming of our Lord, and then be taken up with him into heaven: from all which, they probably (as they thought) concluded, that the day of judgment would happen before the end of that age, whilſt St. *John* was alive: but St. *John*, who writ laſt of the Evangeliſts, (as *Euſebius* tells us) and lived 'till after the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, as he acquaints us with this miſtake, which was current among the chriſtians, ſo he takes care to rectify it, telling us, that *Jeſus ſaid not, He ſhould not die*; but, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* he tells us, that our Saviour did not affirm that *he ſhould not die*; but, to repreſs St. *Peter*'s curioſity, he ſays, *If it were my pleaſure that he ſhould not die at all, but live till I come to judgment, what is that to thee?* And St. *Peter* likewiſe (or whoever was the author of this ſecond epiſtle, or at leaſt of this third chapter, which ſeems to be a new epiſtle by itſelf) takes notice of this miſtake, about the nearneſs of the day of judgment, as that which gave occaſion to theſe *ſcoffers* to deride the expectation of a future judgment among the chriſtians, becauſe they had been already deceived about the time of it; and this the *ſcoffers* twitted them with, in that queſtion, *Where is the promiſe of his coming?* Therefore the learned *Grotius* conjectures very probably, that this laſt epiſtle (contained in the third chapter) was written after the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, which was the time fixed for Chriſt's coming to judgment, and therefore there could be no ground for this ſcoff 'till after that time. St. *Peter*, indeed, did not live ſo long; and therefore *Grotius* thinks that this epiſtle was writ by *Simeon*, or *Simon*, who was ſucceſſor of St. *James* in the biſhoprick of *Jeruſalem*, and lived to the time of *Trajan*.

I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might underſtand where the ground and force of this ſcoff lay, namely, in this, that becauſe the chriſtians had generally been very confident that the coming of Chriſt to judgment would be preſently after the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and were now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future judgment; becauſe they might be deceived in that as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very falſely; becauſe our Saviour had poſitively and peremptorily foretold his coming to judgment, but had never fixed and determined the time of it: nay, ſo far was he from that, that he had plainly told his diſciples that the preciſe time of the day of judgment God had reſerved as a ſecret to himſelf, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the angels in heaven, nor to the Son himſelf; *Mark.* xiii. 32, 33. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father; Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is.* So that if they preſumed to make any conjectures about the time when the day of judgment would be, they did it without any warrant from our Lord: it was great preſumption in them to determine the time of it, when our Saviour had ſo expreſly told them that the Father had reſerved this as a ſecret, which he had never communicated to any; and therefore if they were miſtaken about it, it was no wonder. But their miſtake in this, was no prejudice to the truth of our Saviour's clear prediction of a future judgment, without any determination of the time of it, for that might be at ſome thouſands of years diſtance, and yet be certain for all that; and the delay of it, was no ſign of the uncertainty of our Saviour's prediction concerning it, but only of God's great patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, in expectation of their repentance; *God is not*

not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs, but is long-ſuffering to us-ward. And this brings me to the

Third and *laſt* particular in the text, namely, The true reaſon of God's patience and long-ſuffering to mankind; *He is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* And for this St. *Peter* cites St. *Paul*, ver. 15 of this chapter; *And account that the long-ſuffering of the Lord is ſalvation*; that is, that the great end and deſign of God's goodneſs and long-ſuffering to ſinners, is, that they may repent, and be ſaved; *Account that the long-ſuffering of our Lord is ſalvation, even as our beloved brother Paul alſo, according to the wiſdom given unto him, hath written unto you.* Now theſe words are not expreſly found in St. *Paul*'s writings: but the ſenſe and effect of them is, *viz.* in *Rom.* ii. 4. *Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?* God hath a very gracious and merciful deſign in his patience to ſinners: He is good, that he may make us ſo, and that *his goodneſs may lead us to repentance.* He defers puniſhment on purpoſe, that he may give men time to bethink themſelves, and to return to a better mind: *He winks at the ſins of men, that they may repent*, ſays the ſon of *Sirach.* The patience of God aims at the cure and recovery of thoſe who are not deſperately and reſolutely wicked.

This is the primary end and intention of God's patience to ſinners; and if he fail of this end, through our hardneſs and impenitency, he hath other ends, which he will infallibly attain: He will hereby glorify the riches of his mercy, and vindicate the righteouſneſs of his juſtice; the damned in hell ſhall acknowledge, that the patience of God, was great mercy and goodneſs to them, though they abuſed it; for God does not loſe the glory of his patience, though we loſe the benefit of it, and he will make it ſubſervient to his juſtice, one way or other. Thoſe great offenders whom he ſpares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he, many times, make uſe of, as inſtruments for the puniſhing of others, *as rods of his wrath, for the diſcipline of the world*; and he often reſerves thoſe who are incorrigibly bad, for a more remarkable ruin: but, however, they are reſerved to the judgment of the great day; and if after God hath exerciſed much patience towards ſinners in this world, he inflicts puniſhment on them in the next, it muſt be acknowledged to be moſt juſt: for what can he do leſs, than to condemn thoſe who would not be ſaved, and to make them miſerable who ſo obſtinately refuſed to be happy?

Before I come to apply this diſcourſe concerning the patience and long-ſuffering of God to ſinners, I muſt remove an objection or two:

I. The ſeverity of God to ſome ſinners in this life, and to all impenitent ſinners in the next, ſeems to contradict what hath been ſaid concerning God's patience and long-ſuffering.

As for the ſeverity of God towards impenitent ſinners in the next life, this doth not at all contradict the patience of God; becauſe the very nature of patience, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, does ſuppoſe a determinate time, and that they will not laſt always: This life is the day of God's patience, and in the next world his juſtice and ſeverity will take place: And therefore the puniſhment of ſinners in another world, after God hath tried them in this, and expected their repentance, is no ways contrary to his patience and goodneſs, and very agreeable to his wiſdom and juſtice; for it is no part of goodneſs, to ſee itſelf perpetually abuſed; it is not patience, but ſtupidity and inſenſibleneſs, to endure to be always trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and juſt laws for ever deſpiſed and contemned.

And as for his ſeverity to ſome ſinners in this life; as to *Lot*'s wife, to the *Iſraelite* that gathered ſticks on the Sabbath-day, to *Nadab* and *Abihu*, to *Uzzah*, to *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, and to *Herod Agrippa*; in all which inſtances God ſeems to have made quick work, and to have executed judgment ſpeedily: To theſe I anſwer, That this ſeverity of God to ſome few, doth rather magnify his patience to the reſt of mankind; he may be ſevere to ſome few for example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better uſe of his patience, and not to treſpaſs ſo boldly upon it; and, perhaps, he hath exerciſed much patience already towards thoſe to whom at laſt he is ſo ſevere, as is plain in the caſe of *Herod*, and it may well be ſuppoſed in moſt of the other inſtances; or elſe the ſin ſo ſuddenly and ſeverely puniſhed, was very heinous and preſumptuous, of a contagious and ſpreading nature, and of dangerous example. *Lot's* wife ſinned moſt preſumptuouſly againſt an expreſs and an eaſy command, and whilſt God was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of *Nadab* and *Abihu*, and of the man that gathered ſticks on the Sabbath-day, were preſently after the giving of the law, in which caſe great ſeverity is neceſſary; and that of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, at the firſt publiſhing of the goſpel, that the majeſty of the divine Spirit, and the authority of the firſt publiſhers of it, might not be contemned: That of *Uzzah*, was upon the return of the ark of God from among the *Philiſtines*, that the people might not loſe their reverence for it, after it had been taken captive. So that theſe neceſſary ſeverities to a few, in compariſon of thoſe many that are warned by them, are rather arguments of God's patience, than objections againſt it.

II. It is objected, That if God do not deſire the ruin of ſinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to paſs that all are not brought to repentance? for who hath reſiſted his will? To this I anſwer,

1. That there is no doubt but God is able to do this: He can, if he pleaſeth, conquer and reclaim the moſt obſtinate ſpirits; he is able out of *ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham:* And ſometimes he exerts his omnipotence herein, as in the converſion of St. *Paul*, in a kind of violent and irreſiſtable manner: but he hath no where declared that he will do this to all; and we ſee plainly, in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be ſaid, *not to be willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance*, when he does, on his part, what is ſufficient to that end; and upon this grouud the ſcripture every-where repreſents God as deſiring the repentance of ſinners, and their obedience to his laws: *Deut.* v. 29. *O that there were ſuch an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them!* So *Jer.* xiii. 27. *O Jeruſalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when ſhall it once be? Iſa.* v. 3, 4. we find God there ſolemnly appealing to the people of *Iſrael*, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done; *And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* God may juſtly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience from thoſe to whom he affords a ſufficiency of means to that end. And if ſo, then,

3. The true reaſon why men do not repent, but periſh, is becauſe they are obſtinate, and will not repent; and this account the ſcripture every where gives of the impenitency of men, and the ruin conſequent upon it: *Pſal.* lxxxi. 13. *O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Iſrael had walked in my ways! But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Iſrael would none of me.* Ezek. xxxiii. 11. *Why will ye die, O houſe of Iſrael?* Prov. i. 29, 30, 31. *That they hated knowledge, and did not chuſe the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counſel; they deſpiſed all my reproof. Therefore they ſhall eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.* The ruin of ſinners, doth not proceed from the counſel of God, but from their own choice. And ſo likewiſe our Saviour every where chargeth the ruin and deſtruction of the *Jews* upon their own wilful obſtinacy.

The inferences from this diſcourſe, concerning the patience and long-ſuffering of God towards mankind, ſhall be theſe *three:*

I. To ſtir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great patience of God towards us, notwithſtanding our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to ourſelves thoſe words, *Lam.* iii. 22. *It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not conſumed, becauſe his compaſſions fail not.* They are *renewed every morning.* Whenever we ſin, (and *we provoke God every day)* it is of his *patience that we are not deſtroyed:* and when we ſin again, this is a new and greater inſtance of God's patience. The mercies of God's patience, are no more to be numbered than our ſins: We may ſay with *David, How great is the ſum of them?* The goodneſs of God in ſparing us, is, in ſome reſpect, greater than his goodneſs in creating us: becauſe he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to deſtroy us.

II. Let us propound the patience of God, for a pattern to ourſelves. *Plutarch* ſays, "That God ſets forth himſelf in the midſt of the world for our imitation, and propounds to us the example of his patience, to teach us not to revenge injuries haſtily upon one another."

III. Let us comply with the deſign of God's patience and long-ſuffering towards us, which is *to bring us to repentance.* Men are very apt to abuſe it to a quite contrary purpoſe, to the encouraging themſelves in their evil ways. So *Solomon* obſerves, *Eccl.* viii. 11. *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.* But this is very falſe reaſoning; for the patience of God is an enemy to ſin, as well as his juſtice; and the deſign of it is not to countenance ſin, but to convert the ſinner: *Rom.* ii. 4. *Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering; not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?* Patience in God, ſhould produce repentance in us; and we ſhould look upon it as an opportunity given us by God to repent, and be ſaved; 2 *Pet.* iii. 15. *Account that the long-ſuffering of God is ſalvation.* They that do not improve the patience of God to their own ſalvation, miſtake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are ſo far from making this uſe of it, that they preſume upon it, and ſin with more courage and confidence becauſe of it: But that we may be ſenſible of the danger of this, I will offer theſe two or three conſiderations;

1. That nothing is more provoking to God, than the abuſe of his patience. God's patience waits for our repentance; and all long attendance, even of inferiors upon their ſuperiors, hath ſomething in it that is grievous: How much more grievous and provoking muſt it be to the great God, after he hath laid out upon us all the riches of his goodneſs and long-ſuffering, to have that deſpiſed? after his patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thruſt away with contempt, but to have that which ſhould be an argument to us to leave our ſins, abuſed into an encouragement to continue in them? God takes an account of all the days of his patience and forbearance; *Luke* xiii. 7. *Behold, theſe three years I come ſeeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?*

2. Conſider that the patience of God will have an end. Though God ſuffers long, he will not ſuffer always; we may provoke God ſo long, 'till he can forbear no longer without injury and diſhonour to his wiſdom, and juſtice, and holineſs; and God will not ſuffer one attribute to wrong the reſt: his wiſdom will determine the length of his patience; and when his patience is to no purpoſe, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his wiſdom will then put a period to it; then the patience of his mercy will determine. *How often would I have gathered you, and you would not? therefore your houſe is left unto you deſolate.* And the patience of God's judgments will then determine. *Why ſhould they be ſmitten any more? they will revolt more and more.* Yea, patience itſelf, after a long and fruitleſs expectation, will expire. A ſinner may continue ſo long impenitent, 'till the patience of God, as I may ſay, grows impenitent, and then our ruin will make haſte, and deſtruction *will come upon us in a moment.* If men will not come to repentance, *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*, as it follows in the next verſe after the text; the judgment of God will ſuddenly ſurprize thoſe who will not be gained by his patience.

3. Conſider, that nothing will more haſten and aggravate our ruin, than the abuſe of God's patience. All this time of God's patience, his wrath is coming towards us; and the more we preſume upon it, the ſooner it will overtake us: *Luke* xii. 45, 46. the wicked ſervant, who ſaid *his Lord delayed his coming*, and fell to *rioting and drunkenneſs*; our Saviour tells us, That *the Lord of that ſervant will come in a day when he looks not for him.*

And it will aggravate our ruin; the longer puniſhment is a coming, the heavier it will be: Thoſe things which are long in preparation, are terrible in execution; the weight of God's wrath, will make amends for the ſlowneſs of it; and the delay of judgment, will be fully recompenſed in the dreadfulneſs of it when it comes.

Let all thoſe conſider this, who go on in their ſin, and are deaf to the voice of God's patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of vengeance a coming upon thoſe who trifle away this day of God's patience: Nothing will ſooner and more inflame the wrath and diſpleaſure of God againſt us, than his abuſed patience, and the deſpiſed riches of his goodneſs. As oil, though it be ſoft and ſmooth, yet, when it is once inflamed, burns moſt fiercely; ſo the patience of God, when it is abuſed, turns into fury; and his mildeſt attributes, into the greateſt ſeverities.

And if the patience of God do not bring us to repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin: After God hath kept a long indignation in his breaſt, it will, at length, break forth with the greater violence. The patience of God, increaſeth his judgments by an incredible kind of proportion; *Levit.* xxvi. 18. *And if you will ſtill* (ſays God to the people of *Iſrael*) *walk contrary to me, and if ye will not be reformed by all theſe things, I will puniſh you yet ſeven times more.* And *verſe* 28. *I will bring ſeven times more plagues upon you, according to your ſins.* At firſt God's *juſtice* accuſeth ſinners; but, after a long time of patience, his *mercy* comes in againſt us, and, inſtead of ſtaying his hand, adds weight to his blows; *Rom.* ix. 22. *What if God, willing to ſhew his wrath, and to make his power known, endureth with much long-ſuffering the veſſels of wrath fitted for deſtruction?* They upon whom the patience of God hath no good effect, are *veſſels of wrath, prepared and fitted for deſtruction.* If ever God diſplay his wrath, and make his anger known, he will do it in the moſt ſevere manner upon thoſe who have deſpiſed and abuſed his patience; for theſe, in a more peculiar manner, *do treaſure up for themſelves wrath againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

To conclude: Let us all take a review of our lives, and conſider how long the patience of God hath waited upon us, and borne with us; with ſome, twenty, forty, perhaps ſixty years, and longer. Do we not remember how God ſpared us in ſuch a danger, when we gave ourſelves for loſt? and how he recovered us in ſuch a ſickneſs, when the phyſician gave us up for gone? And what uſe have we made of this patience and long-ſuffering of God towards us? It is the worſt temper in the world, not to be melted by kindneſs, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle uſage. He that is not wrought upon, neither by the patience of his mercy, nor by the patience of his judgments, his caſe is deſperate, and paſt remedy. *Conſider this, all ye that forget God,* leſt his patience turn into fury; for *God is not ſlack, as ſome men count ſlackneſs; but long-ſuffering to ſinners, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.*

SERMON XCVII.

The Long-ſuffering of God.

ECCLES. VIII. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.

NOTHING is more evident, than that *the world lies in wickedneſs, and* that *iniquity* every-where *abounds*; and yet nothing is more certain, than that *God will not acquit the guilty,* and let ſin go unpuniſhed. All men, excepting thoſe who have offered notorious violence to the light of their own minds, and *have put the candle of the Lord,* which is in them, *under a buſhel,* do believe that there is a God in the world, to whoſe holy nature and will ſin is perfectly contrary, *who loves righteouſneſs, and hates iniquity*; that *his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he ſeeth all his goings*; that *there is no darkneſs, nor ſhadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themſelves.* All men, except thoſe whoſe *conſciences are ſeared, as it were, with an hot iron,* are convinced of the difference of *good* and *evil,* and that it is not all one whether *men ſerve God,* or *ſerve him not,* do well, or live wickedly. Every man, from his inward ſenſe and experience, is ſatisfied of his own liberty, and that God lays upon men no neceſſity of ſinning, but that whenever we do amiſs, it is our own act, and we chuſe to do ſo; and ſo far is he from giving the leaſt countenance to ſin, that he hath given all imaginable diſcouragement to it, by the moſt ſevere and terrible threatenings, ſuch as one would think ſufficient to deter men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the world; and to make his threatenings the more awful and effectual, his providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable inſtances of his juſtice and ſeverity upon notorious offenders, even in this life: and yet, for all this, men do, and will ſin; nay, they are zealouſly ſet and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives ſinners ſuch heart, and makes them ſo reſolute and undaunted in ſo dangerous a courſe. *Solomon* gives us this account of it; becauſe the puniſhments and judgments of God follow the ſins of men ſo ſlowly, and are long before they overtake the ſinner; *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the hearts of the ſons of men are fully ſet in them to do evil.*

The ſcope of the wiſe man's diſcourſe is this; That, by reaſon of God's forbearance and long-ſuffering towards ſinners in this life, it is not ſo eaſy to diſcern the difference between them and other men; this life is the day of God's patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompence. Now becauſe God doth defer and moderate the puniſhment of ſinners in this world, and reſerve the weight of his judgments to the next; becauſe, through the long-ſuffering of God, many great ſinners live and die without any remarkable teſtimony of God's wrath and diſpleaſure againſt them; *therefore the heart of the children of men are fully ſet in them to do evil.*

If we render the text word for word from the original, it runs this; *Becauſe nothing is done as a recompence to an evil work, therefore the heart of the ſons of men are full in them to do evil*; that is, Becauſe men are not oppoſed and contradicted in their evil ways, becauſe divine juſtice doth not preſently check and controul ſinners, becauſe *ſentence is not immediately paſt* upon them, and *judgment executed, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is* full in them to *do evil*; that is, therefore men grow bold and preſumptuous in ſin: for the *Hebrew* word which we render, *is fully ſet in them*, we find, *Eſth.* vii. 5. where *Ahaſuerus* ſays, concerning *Haman*, *Who is he? and where is he that durſt preſume in his heart to do ſo? Whoſe heart was full to do ſo? Fervit in iis cor filiorum hominum*; ſo ſome render it, *the hearts of men boil with wickedneſs*; are ſo full of it, that it *works over.* Men are reſolute in an evil courſe, *their hearts are ſtrengthened and hardened in them to do evil*, ſo others tranſlate the words. The tranſlation of the LXX is very emphatical, ἐπληροφορήθη καρδία, *the heart of the ſons of men is fully perſuaded and aſſured to do evil.* All theſe tranſlations agree in the main ſcope and ſenſe, *viz.* That ſinners are very apt to preſume upon the long-ſuffering of God, and to abuſe it, to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in their evil ways. In the handling of this, I ſhall

Firſt, Briefly ſhew that it is ſo.

Secondly, Whence this comes to paſs, and upon what pretences and colours of reaſon, men encourage themſelves in ſin, from the patience of God.

Thirdly, I ſhall endeavour to anſwer an objection about this matter.

Firſt, That men are very apt to abuſe the long-ſuffering of God, to the encouraging and hardening of themſelves in an evil courſe, the experience of the world, in all ages, does give abundant teſtimony. Thus it was with the old world, *when the long-ſuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while he was preparing an ark, for the ſpace of an hundred and twenty years*, 1 Pet. iii. 20. For the wickedneſs of man, which was great upon the earth, a general deluge was threatened; but God was patient, and delayed his judgment a great while: hereupon they grew ſecure in their impenitency, and went on in their courſe, as if they had no apprehenſion of danger, no fear of the judgment threatened. So our Saviour tells us, *Matth.* xxiv. 38, 39. *As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.* And ſo it was with *Sodom*, *Luke* xvii. 28. And *likewiſe alſo as it was in the days of Lot, they eat, they drank, they bought, they ſold, they planted, they built.* And ſo, our Saviour tells us, it will be in the end of the world; *Even thus ſhall it be in the day when the ſon of man is revealed.* So likewiſe the apoſtle St. *Paul*, Rom. ii. 4, 5. *Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth* *thee to repentance? But after thy hardneſs and impenitent heart, treaſureſt up to thyſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* The goodneſs and long-ſuffering of God, which ought in all reaſon to lead men to repentance, is to many an occaſion of greater hardneſs and impenitency. So alſo St. *Peter* foretels, 2 *Pet.* iii. 3. *That in the laſt days there ſhould come ſcoffers, who ſhould walk after their own hearts luſts, ſaying, Where is the promiſe of his coming?* And we ſee, in daily experience, that the greateſt part of ſinners grow more obſtinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of God's patience, and becauſe he delays the puniſhment due to them for their ſins. Let us conſider, in the

Second place, Whence this comes to paſs, and upon what pretence and colour of reaſon men encourage themſelves in ſin, from the long-ſuffering of God. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconſiderateneſs, and from *an evil heart of unbelief*, from the temptation and ſuggeſtion of the devil, one of whoſe great arts it is, to make men queſtion the threatnings of God, and to inſinuate, as he did to our firſt parents, either that he hath not denounced ſuch threatenings, or that he will not execute them ſo ſeverely. All theſe cauſes do concur to the producing this monſtrous effect: But that which I deſign to enquire into, is from what pretence of reaſon, grounded upon the long-ſuffering of God, ſinners argue themſelves into this confidence and preſumption. For when the wiſe man ſaith, that *becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil*; he does not intend to inſinuate, that God's long-ſuffering fills the hearts of men with wicked deſigns and reſolutions, and does, by a proper and direct efficacy, harden ſinners in their courſe; but, that wicked men, upon ſome account or other, do take occaſion, from the long-ſuffering of God, to harden themſelves in ſin; they draw falſe concluſions from it to impoſe upon themſelves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they ſee ſomething in the forbearance of God, and his delay of puniſhment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil courſe, notwithſtanding the threatenings of God.

And therefore I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, what thoſe falſe concluſions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of puniſhment, and to diſcover the ſophiſtry and fallacy of them; and I ſhall rank them under *two* heads; thoſe which are more groſs and atheiſtical; and thoſe which are not ſo groſs, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Thoſe concluſions wich are more groſs and atheiſtical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in ſin, from the delay of puniſhment, (which we, who believe a God, call the patience or long-ſuffering of God) are theſe *three*; either that there is no God; or if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil.

I ſhall ſpeak more briefly of theſe, becauſe I hope there are but few in the world of ſuch irregular and beſotted underſtandings, as to make ſuch inferences as theſe, from the delay of puniſhment.

1ſt, From hence ſome would fain conclude, that there is no God. That ſome are ſo abſurd as to reaſon in this manner, the ſcripture tells us, *Pſal.* xiv. 1. *The fool hath ſaid in his heart, There is no God: they are corrupt, and have done abominable works.* Now the argument that theſe men frame to themſelves, is this; God doth not take a ſpeedy courſe with ſinners, and revenge himſelf immediately upon the workers of iniquity, therefore there is no God; for if there were, he would ſhew himſelf, and not bear the affronts of ſinners, when it is ſo eaſy for him to vindicate himſelf by a ſwift and ſpeedy vengeance. Thus the poet repreſents the atheiſt arguing; *Nullos eſſe deos, inane cælum, affirmat Selius, probatque, quod ſe factum, dum negat hoc, videt beatum. Selius* affirms, “there are no gods, and that heaven is an “empty place, and proves it, becauſe, whilſt he denies God, he ſees himſelf in a “very happy and proſperous condition.”

And here it is worthy our notice, at what a contradictious rate theſe men reaſon. *Firſt*, They would have no God, leſt he ſhould be juſt, and puniſh them as they deſerve; and then, in another mood, they would have him to be nothing but juſtice and ſeverity, leſt there ſhould be a God: as if no other notion could be framed of the divine nature, but of a raſh fury, and impetuous revenge, and an impotent paſſion, which, when it is offended and provoked, cannot contain itſelf, and forbear puniſhment for a moment. Juſtice is not ſuch a perfection as doth neceſſarily exclude wiſdom, and goodneſs, and patience; it doth in no wiſe contradict the perfection of the divine nature to bear with ſinners, in expectation of their repentance and amendment; or if God foreſees their final impenitency, to reſpite their puniſhment to the moſt fit and convenient ſeaſon. God may ſuffer long, and yet be reſolved, if ſinners perſiſt in the abuſe of his goodneſs and patience, to execute vengeance upon them in due time. It is a pitiful ground of atheiſm, that becauſe God is ſo much better than wicked men deſerve, they will not allow him to be at all.

2dly, Others infer from the delay of puniſhment, that there is no providence that adminiſters the affairs of the world, and regards the good and bad actions of men. For though the being of God be acknowledged, yet if he do not regard what is done here below, nor concern himſelf in human affairs, ſinners are as ſafe and free to do what they pleaſe, as if there were no God; and upon this ground, the ſcripture tells us, many encourage themſelves in their wickedneſs; *Pſal.* lxiv. 5. *They encourage themſelves in an evil matter; they commune of laying ſnares privily; they ſay, Who ſhall ſee them?* And more expreſly, *Pſal.* xciv. 4, 5, 6, 7. *How long ſhall they utter and ſpeak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boaſt themſelves? They break in pieces, thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They ſlay the widow and the ſtranger, and murder the fatherleſs. Yet they ſay, The Lord ſhall not ſee, neither ſhall the God of Jacob regard it.* And if this were ſo, well might they encourage themſelves. If it were true which *Epicurus* ſaith, "That God takes no "knowledge of the actions of men; that he is far removed from us, and contented "with himſelf, and not at all concerned in what we do:" If this were true, the inference which *Lucretius* makes, were very juſt; *Quare religio pedibus ſubjecta viciſſim obteritur*; "Men might trample religion under their feet, and live without any "regard to the laws of it."

But let us ſee how they infer this from the long-ſuffering of God, that he neglects the affairs of the world, and hath no conſideration of the actions of men, becauſe they ſee the ungodly to proſper in the world equally with others that are ſtrictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times, to be in a more proſperous and flouriſhing condition; *they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men.* So that if there be a God, it ſeems (ſay they) that he connives at the crimes of men, and *looks on upon them that deal treacherouſly, and holds his peace whilſt the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than himſelf*, as the prophet expreſſeth it, *Habak.* i. 13.

For anſwer to this, I ſhall only give this reaſonable and credible account of the long-ſuffering of God, and the impunity of wicked men in this life, which not only the ſcripture gives us, but the heathen were able to give from the light of nature, and is agreeable to the common ſenſe of mankind, namely, that this life is a ſtate of probation and trial, wherein God *ſuffers men to walk in their own ways* without any viſible check and reſtraint, and does not uſually inflict preſent and remarkable puniſhments upon them for their evil deeds; becauſe this, being a ſtate of trial of the diſpoſitions and manners of men, is rather the proper ſeaſon of patience, than of puniſhments and rewards; and therefore it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe that God reſerves ſinners for a ſolemn and publick trial at the great aſſizes of the world, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his juſtice upon the deſpiſers of his patience and long ſuffering, when he will make *his judgment to break forth as the light, and his righteouſneſs as the noon-day.* In the mean time, the providence of God, when he ſees it fit, gives ſome remarkable inſtances of his juſtice upon great and notorious offenders in this life, as a pledge and earneſt of a future judgment; and theſe, ſometimes, more general, as in the deſtruction of the old world by an univerſal deluge, when *he ſaw the wickedneſs of men to be great upon the earth:* And ſuch was that terrible vengeance which was poured down upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, and the cities about them; which, as St. *Jude* tells us, *are ſet forth for an example, ſuffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, that is, of a perpetual deſtruction by fire.

3dly. Another groſs and atheiſtical inference, which men are apt to make from the delay of puniſhment, is, That there is no ſuch difference of *good* and *evil* as is pretended; becauſe they do not ſee the good and bad actions of men differenced in their rewards, becauſe divine juſtice doth not preſently manifeſt itſelf; and *every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience* doth not immediately *receive a juſt recompence of reward*, therefore they cannot believe that the difference between *good* and *evil* is ſo great and evident.

For anſwer to this: Not to inſiſt upon the difference which the providence of God ſometimes makes between them in this life, I appeal to the conſciences of men, whether they do not ſecretly and inwardly acknowledge a clear difference between *good* and *evil*. Are not the worſt of men apt to conceive better hopes of ſucceſs, when they are about a juſt and honeſt undertaking, than when they are engaged in a wicked deſign? Do not bad men feel a ſecret ſhame and horror, when no eye ſees them, and the wickedneſs they are about to commit doth not fall under the cognizance and cenſure of any human court or tribunal? Have they not many checks and rebukes in their own ſpirits, much diſturbance and confuſion of mind, when they are enterprizing a wicked thing? And does not this plainly argue, that they are guilty to themſelves, that they are about ſomething which they ought not to do?

It is very true, that moſt men are more ſenſible of the evil of an action, when they feel the ill effects and conſequences of it, and ſuffer the puniſhment that is due to it: But yet the ſenſe of *good* and *evil* is ſo deeply impreſt upon human nature, that I think no man, remaining *a man*, can quite deface and blot out the difference of *good* and *evil*. So that if men will but attend to the natural dictates and ſuggeſtions of their own minds, they cannot poſſibly infer, from the delay of puniſhment, that there is no difference of *good* and *evil*.

But becauſe thoſe who are thus, are but few, in compariſon, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindneſs, and height of impiety, as to diſbelieve *a God* and *a providence*; and I think none have attained to that perfect conqueſt of conſcience, as to have loſt all ſenſe of *good* and *evil*; therefore I ſhall rather inſiſt,

II. Upon thoſe kind of reaſonings which are more ordinary and common among bad men, and whereby they cheat themſelves into everlaſting perdition; and they are ſuch as theſe:

1. *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not ſpeedily executed*, therefore ſin is not ſo great an evil.
2. Therefore God is not ſo highly offended and provoked by it. Or,
3. God is not ſo ſevere in his own nature, as he is commonly repreſented.
4. Therefore the puniſhment of ſin is not ſo certain. Or, however,
5. It is at a diſtance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death. By ſome ſuch falſe reaſonings as theſe, which men think may probably be collected from the patience and long-ſuffering of God, they harden and encourage themſelves in an evil courſe.

1. Becauſe the puniſhment of ſin is deferred, therefore they conclude it is not ſo great an evil; they do not feel the ill effects of it at preſent; all things go well and proſperouſly with them, no leſs than with thoſe who are ſo ſtrict and conſcientious; and therefore they hope there is no ſuch great evil in ſin, as melancholy people are apt to fancy to themſelves. For anſwer to this,

(1.) Conſider ſeriouſly what ſin is, and then thou wilt ſee reaſon enough to call it a great evil. To ſin againſt God, is to contemn the greateſt authority in the world, to contradict the greateſt holineſs and purity, to abuſe the greateſt goodneſs, and to provoke almighty juſtice to take vengeance upon thee, and to make thee as miſerable as thou art capable of being. To ſin againſt God, is to be diſobedient to thy Sovereign, and unthankful to thy beſt Benefactor, and to act contrary to the greateſt obligations, againſt thy beſt reaſon and trueſt intereſt; to diſoblige thy kindeſt friend, and to gratify thy worſt and bittereſt enemy; it is to diſorder thyſelf, to create perpetual diſquiet to thy own mind, and to do the greateſt miſchief poſſible to thyſelf; to deprive thyſelf of the greateſt happineſs and to draw down upon thyſelf extreme and eternal miſery. And what do we call a great evil, if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds and all the aggravations of evil that can be, and hath all the circumſtances of uglineſs and deformity in it that can be imagined?

(2.) Whatever ſin be in itſelf, yet from hence we can in no wiſe conclude that it is not a great evil, becauſe the puniſhment of it is deferred for a while: from hence indeed it follows, that God is very good in deferring the puniſhment which is due to thee for thy ſins, but by no means that ſin is not very evil. The reprieve of a traitor does indeed argue the goodneſs and clemency of the prince, but doth not at all abate of the heinouſneſs of the crime for which he is ſentenced. The great evil of ſin is evident, becauſe the holy and juſt God hath forbidden it, and declared his hatred and deteſtation of it, and threatned it with moſt ſevere and direful puniſhment; but that God reſpites the puniſhment which is due to ſin, and does not immediately take vengeance upon ſinners, but affords them a ſpace, and means, and opportunity of repentance: This doth not at all leſſen the evil of ſin, but is rather an aggravation of it, that we ſhould offend and provoke that God who is ſo patient and long-ſuffering towards us, ſo very loth to bring thoſe evils upon us, which we are ſo raſh and forward to pull down upon ourſelves.

2. If God doth not immediately puniſh ſin upon the commiſſion of it, and inſtantly let fly at the ſinner, this they would conſtrue to be a ſign that he is not ſo highly offended and provoked by it; if he were he would manifeſt his diſpleaſure againſt it, by the ſudden and violent effuſions of his wrath. For anſwer to this, I deſire theſe *two* things may be conſidered:

(1.) That God himſelf, in his word, every-where plainly declares to us his great diſpleaſure againſt ſin: *Pſal.* v. 4, 5. *Thou art not a God that haſt pleaſure in wickedneſs, neither ſhall evil dwell with thee. The fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in thy ſight; thou hateſt all the workers of Iniquity. Thou art not a God that haſt pleaſure in wickedneſs.* The words are a μείωσις, and leſs is ſpoken than is meant and intended, *viz.* That God is ſo far from taking pleaſure in the ſins of men, that he is highly diſpleaſed at them, and bears an implacable hatred againſt them.

And do not the terrible threatenings of God againſt ſin declare him to be highly offended at it? when he ſays, That *he will come in flaming fire to render vengeance to all them that know not the goſpel of his Son*; and that they *ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction, from the preſence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Can we think that all the threatenings of God's word, and all thoſe direful *curſes* which *are written in his book, ſhall return empty,* without doing any execution? Thou that now flattereſt thyſelf in vain and groundleſs hopes, that none of theſe evils ſhall come upon thee, when thou comeſt to ſtand before the great Judge of the world, and to behold the killing frowns of his countenance, and to hear thoſe bitter words of eternal diſpleaſure from the mouth of God himſelf, *Depart, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*; thou wilt then believe that God is heartily angry and offended with thee for thy ſins. We ſhall find in that day, that the threatenings of God's word, which we now hear ſecurely, and without terror, had a full ſignification; or rather, that no words could convey to us the terror of them. What the ſcripture ſays of the happineſs and glory of the next life, is true alſo of the miſery and puniſhments of the other world, that *eye hath not ſeen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, thoſe terrible things which God hath reſerved for the workers of iniquity.*

But, above all, the direful ſufferings of the Son of God, when ſin was but imputed to him, are a demonſtration of God's implacable hatred of ſin; for that rather than ſin ſhould go unpuniſhed, God was was pleaſed to ſubject his own Son to the ſufferings due to it: This plainly ſhews, that he hated ſin, as much as he loved his own Son.

But, (*2dly*,) God may conceive a very great diſpleaſure againſt ſin, and be highly incenſed and provoked by it, and yet ſuſpend the effects of his diſpleaſure, and defer the puniſhment of it for a great while: And to imagine otherwiſe, argues a groſs miſtake of the nature of God, ariſing from our not conſidering the attributes and perfections of God in conjunction and conſiſtency with one another. When we conſider one attribute of God ſingly, and ſeparate it from the reſt, and frame ſuch wide and large apprehenſions of it, as to exclude his other perfections, we have a falſe notion of God; and the reaſon of this miſtake is, becauſe among men, an eminent degree of any one excellency doth commonly ſhut out others; becauſe, in our narrow and finite nature, many perfections cannot ſtand together; but it is quite otherwiſe in the divine nature. In infinite perfection, all perfections do meet and conſiſt together; one perfection doth not hinder and exclude another, and therefore in our conceptions of God, we are to take great heed that we do not raiſe any one attribute or perfection of God upon the ruin of the reſt.

So that it is a falſe imagination of God, when we ſo attribute *juſtice* or *anger* to him, as to exclude his *patience* and *long-ſuffering*: for God is not impotent in his anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not preſently put him out of patience, ſo that he cannot contain his wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himſelf upon ſinners. In this ſenſe, God ſays of himſelf, *Iſa.* xxvii. 4. *Fury is not in me.* There is nothing of a raſh and ungoverned paſſion in the wiſe and juſt God. Every ſin, indeed, kindles his anger, and provokes his diſpleaſure againſt us, and, by our repeated and continued offences, we ſtill add fuel to his wrath; but it doth not of neceſſity inſtantly break forth like *a conſuming fire, and a devouring flame.* The holy and righteous nature of God, makes him neceſſarily offended and diſpleaſed with the ſins of men; but as to the manifeſtation of his wrath, and the effects of his anger, his wiſdom and goodneſs do regulate and determine the proper time and circumſtances of puniſhment.

3. From the patience of God, and the delay of puniſhment, men are apt to conclude, that God is not ſo ſevere in his nature as he is commonly repreſented. It is true, he hath declared his diſpleaſure againſt ſin, and threatened it with dreadful puniſhments; which he may do, in great wiſdom, to keep the world in awe and order: but great things are likewiſe ſpoken of his mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exerciſe of his mercy: ſo that notwithſtanding all the threatenings which are denounced againſt ſin, it is to be hoped, that when *ſentence* comes to be *paſt*, and *judgment* to be *executed*, God *will remember mercy in the midſt of judgment*, and that *mercy will triumph over judgment*; and that as now his patience ſtays his hand, and turns away his wrath, ſo, at the laſt, the milder attributes of his goodneſs and mercy will interpoſe and moderate the rigour and ſeverity of his juſtice; and of this, his great patience and long-ſuffering towards ſinners for the preſent, ſeems to be ſome kind of pledge and earneſt: He that is ſo *ſlow to anger*, and ſo loth to execute puniſhment, may probably be prevailed upon, by his own pity and goodneſs, to remit it at the laſt: And this is the more credible, becauſe it is granted on all hands, that no perſon is obliged to execute his threatenings, as he is to make good his promiſes: he that promiſeth, paſſeth a right to another; but he that threateneth, keeps the right and power of doing what he pleaſeth in his own hands.

I ſhall ſpeak a little more fully to this, becauſe it is almoſt incredible how much men bear up themſelves upon vain and groundleſs hopes of the boundleſs mercy of God, and *bleſs themſelves in their hearts, ſaying, they ſhall have peace, though they walk in the imagination of their hearts, to add drunkenneſs to thirſt*; that, is, though they ſtill perſiſt in their vices, and add one degree of ſin to another.

Now, for anſwer to this,

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare threatening, does not neceſſarily infer the certainty of the event; and that the thing threatened, ſhall infallibly come to paſs: No perſon is obliged to perform his threatenings, as he is his promiſes; the threatenings of God, declare what ſin deſerves, and what the ſinner may juſtly expect, if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But then we are to take notice, that repentance is the only condition that is implied in the threatenings of God, and will effectually hinder the execution of them: *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *At what inſtant I ſpeak* (ſays God) *concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to deſtroy it; if that nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil. I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my ſight, and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good wherewith I ſaid I would benefit them.* Now if when God hath promiſed to do good to a people, ſin will hinder the bleſſing promiſed, and bring down judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threatened.

But as to the caſe of final impenitency and unbelief, God, that he might ſtrengthen his threatenings, hath added a ſign of *immutability* to them, having confirmed them with an oath; *I have ſworn* (ſaith the Lord) *that they ſhall not enter into my reſt:* Which, though it was ſpoken to the unbelieving *Jews*, the apoſtle to the *Hebrews* applies it to a final unbelief and impenitency under the goſpel, of which the infidelity of the *Iſraelites* was a type and figure. Now though God may remit of his threatenings: yet his oath is a plain declaration that he will not; becauſe it ſignifies, the firm and immutable determination of his will, and thereby *puts an end to all doubts and controverſies* concerning the fulfilling of his threatenings.

(2.) It is certainly much the wiſeſt and ſafeſt way, to believe the threatenings of God, in the ſtrictneſs and rigour of them, unleſs there be ſome tacit condition evidently implied in them; becauſe if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwiſe, the conſequence of our miſtake is fatal and dreadful. It is true, indeed, that God, by his threatenings, did intend to keep ſinners in awe, and to deter them from ſin: but if he had any-where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of theſe threatenings, ſuch a revelation would quite take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and deſign of them; for threatenings ſignify very little, but upon this ſuppoſition, that, in all probability, they will be executed: and if this be true, it is the greateſt madneſs and folly in the world to run the hazard of it.

(3.) As for thoſe large declarations which the ſcripture makes of the boundleſs mercy of God to ſinners, we are to limit them, as the ſcripture hath done, to the time and ſeaſon of mercy, which is this life, and while we are in the way. This is the day of mercy and ſalvation; and when this life is ended, the opportunities of grace and mercy are paſt, and *the day of recompence and vengeance* will begin. Now God tries us, and offers mercy to us; but if we obſtinately refuſe it, judgment will take hold of us.

And then we muſt limit the mercy of God to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are, repentance for ſins paſt, and ſincere obedience for the future; but if men continue obſtinate and impenitent, and encourage themſelves in ſin, from the mercy and patience of God; this is not a caſe that admits of mercy, but, on the contrary, his juſtice will triumph in the ruin and deſtruction of thoſe who, inſtead of embracing the offers of his mercy, do deſpiſe and abuſe them: *He will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes; when their fear comes as deſolation, and their deſtruction as a whirl-wind; when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon them, then they* may *call upon him, but he will not anſwer; they* may *ſeek him early, but they ſhall not find him.* If we *deſpiſe the riches of God's goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance,* he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpoſe; *with the froward he will ſhew himſelf froward,* and will be in a more-eſpecial manner ſevere towards thoſe who take encouragement from his mercy, to diſbelieve and deſpiſe his threatenings. And this God hath as plainly told us, as words can expreſs any thing, *Deut.* xxix. 19, 20. *And if it come to paſs that when he heareth the words of this curſe, he bleſs himſelf in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenneſs to thirſt: The Lord will not ſpare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealouſy, ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and all the curſes that are written in this book, ſhall lie upon him, and the Lord ſhall blot out his name from under heaven.* Whatever right and power God hath reſerved to himſelf about the execution of his threatenings, he hath plainly declared, that, of all others, thoſe who encourage themſelves in a ſinful courſe, from the hopes of God's mercy, notwithſtanding his threatenings, ſhall find no favour and mercy at his hand: whatever he may remit of his threatenings to others, he will certainly not ſpare thoſe who believe ſo largely concerning the mercy of God, not with a mind to ſubmit to the terms of it, but to preſume ſo much the more upon it.

(4.) God hath not been wanting to ſhew ſome remarkable inſtances of his ſeverity towards ſinners in this world. As he is pleaſed ſometimes to give good men ſome fore-taſtes of heaven, and earneſts of their future happineſs; ſo likewiſe, by ſome preſent ſtroke, to let ſinners feel what they are to expect hereafter; ſome ſparks of hell do now and then fall upon the conſciences of ſinners. That fear which is ſometimes kindled in mens conſciences in this life, that horrible anguiſh, and thoſe unſpeakable terrors which ſome ſinners have had experience of in this world, may ſerve to forewarn us of *the wrath which is to come,* and to convince us of the reality of thoſe expreſſions of the torments of hell, by *the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched.* That miraculous deluge, which ſwallowed up the old world; that hell which was rained down from heaven in thoſe terrible ſhowers of fire and brimſtone, to conſume *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*; the earth opening her mouth upon *Corah* and his ſeditious company, to let them down, as it were, quick into hell: theſe and many other remarkable judgments of God, in ſeveral ages, upon particular perſons, and upon cities and nations, may ſatisfy us, in ſome meaſure, of the ſeverity of God againſt ſin, and be, as it were, pledges to aſſure ſinners of the inſupportable miſery and torments of the next life.

(5.) The argument is much ſtronger the other way, that becauſe the puniſhment of ſinners is delayed ſo long, therefore it will be much heavier and ſeverer when it comes; that the wrath of God is growing all this while, and as we *fill up the meaſures of our ſins*, he fills the *phial of his wrath:* Rom. ii. 5. *And according to thy hard and impenitent heart, treaſureſt up to thyſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* God now keeps in his diſpleaſure: but all the while we go on in an impenitent courſe, the wrath of God is continually increaſing, and will at laſt be manifeſted by the righteous judgment of God upon ſinners. God now exerciſeth and diſplayeth his milder attributes, his goodneſs, and mercy, and patience: but theſe will not always hold out; there is a dreadful day a coming, wherein (as the apoſtle ſpeaks) God will *ſhew his wrath, and make his power known*, after he hath *endured with much long-ſuffering the veſſels of wrath fitted for deſtruction*. All this long time of God's patience and forbearance *his wrath is kindling, and he is whetting his glittering ſword, and making ſharp his arrows*; and this long preparation doth portend a much more dreadful execution: ſo that we ſhould reaſon thus, from the long-ſuffering of God; God bears with us, and ſpares us at preſent, and keeps in his anger; therefore if we go on to provoke him, time will come when he will not ſpare, but his anger will flame forth, and *his jealouſy ſmoke againſt us.* This is but reaſonable to expect, that they who in this world *forſake their own mercies*, the mercy of God in the next ſhould forſake them.

4. Another falſe concluſion, which men draw from the delay of puniſhment, is, That becauſe it is delayed, therefore it is not ſo certain: The ſinner eſcapes for the preſent; and though he have ſome miſgivings and fearful apprehenſions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

It is true, indeed, we are not ſo certain of the miſery of wicked men in another world, as if it were preſent, and we lay groaning under the weight of it: ſuch a certainty as this, would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and ſtrictly call *faith*; for *faith is the evidence of things not ſeen:* But ſure we have other faculties beſides ſenſe to judge of things by; we may be ſufficiently certain of many things which are neither preſent nor ſenſible, of many things paſt and future, upon good ground and teſtimony: we are ſure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it; we are certain that we ſhall die, though we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their cauſes, as well as in their preſent exiſtence, if the cauſes be certain. The truth of God, who hath declared theſe things to us, is an abundant ground of aſſurance to us, though they be at a great diſtance: The certainty of things, is not ſhaken by our wavering belief concerning them.

Beſides, the very light of nature, and the common reaſon of mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-ſuffering of God, and the delay of preſent puniſhment. Though men are apt to think, that becauſe judgment is deferred, therefore it is not certain; yet the very light of nature hath taught men to reaſon otherwiſe; that becauſe God is ſo patient to ſinners in this life, therefore there will a time come when they ſhall be puniſhed; that becauſe this life is a time of trial and forbearance, therefore there ſhall be another ſtate after this life, which ſhall be a ſeaſon of recompence. And by this argument chiefly it was that the wiſeſt of the heathen ſatisfied themſelves concerning another ſtate after this life, and anſwered the troubleſome objection againſt the providence of God, from the unequal adminiſtration of things in this world, ſo viſible in the afflictions and ſufferings of good men, and the proſperity of the wicked, *viz.* that there would be another ſtate that would adjuſt all theſe matters, and ſet them ſtreight, when good and bad men ſhould receive the full recompence of their deeds.

The *5th* and laſt falſe concluſion which men draw from the long-ſuffering of God, and the delay of puniſhment, is this; That it is, however, probably, at ſome diſtance, and therefore they may ſin yet a while longer, and all this danger may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, becauſe they ſee men much worſe than themſelves, great criminals and malefactors, upon two or three days warning, to perform this work of repentance very ſubſtantially, and to die with great comfort and aſſurance of their ſalvation. This is the moſt common deluſion of all the reſt, and hath been, I am afraid, the ruin of more ſouls than all the other which I have mentioned; they may have *ſlain their thouſands*, but this *its ten thouſands*.

For anſwer to this, be pleaſed ſeriouſly to lay to heart theſe following conſiderations, moſt of which I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to; becauſe I have, upon other occaſions, ſpoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future judgment, then it is certain, at how great a diſtance ſoever it may be. That which ſhall be a thouſand years hence, will certainly be; and it is but very ſmall comfort and encouragement, conſidering the vaſt diſproportion between time and eternity, to think, that after twenty or forty years ſhall be paſt and gone, then muſt I enter upon eternal miſery; then will thoſe intolerable torments begin, which ſhall never have an end.

(2.) But it is not certain that it is at ſuch a diſtance: When we *put from us the evil day*, it is, many times, nearer to us than we are aware; and when we think the judgment of God is at a great diſtance, *the Judge* may be *near*, *even at the door*. Our times are not in our own hands, but we are perfectly at the diſpoſal of another, who, when he pleaſeth, can put a period to them, and cauſe our breath to ceaſe from our noſtrils, and we ſhall not be: *There is no man hath power over the ſpirit, to retain the ſpirit*; *neither hath he power in the day of death*, ſaith the wiſe man, a little before the text. Thou dreameſt, perhaps, of many years continuance in this world, and, perhaps, in the height of this vain imagination, *the decree is ſealed, and the commandment come forth* to ſummon thee out of this world, and thou art juſt dropping into that miſery, which thou fancieſt to be at ſuch a diſtance; whilſt thou art vainly promiſing thyſelf *the eaſe of many years*, God may ſay to thee, *Thou fool, this night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee*; and then, where are all thy hopes?

(3.) Suppoſing the evil day were at a conſiderable diſtance, yet men run an infinite hazard in venturing all the hopes of their ſalvation upon a future repentance; for what knoweſt thou, O man! but thou mayeſt be ſurprized by a ſudden ſtroke, which may give thee no warning, leave thee no ſpace of repentance? A violent diſeaſe may ſeize upon thee, which may diſorder thy underſtanding, and ſo weaken all thy faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reaſonable operations: At the beſt, how unfit are we for the moſt ſerious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old age is a very unſeaſonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakneſs and infirmity, and our minds are crooked and bowed down by vice, as our bodies are by age, and as hard to be recovered to their firſt ſtreightneſs; much more is it an improper time for this work, when ſickneſs and old age meet together. There are two things in which men, in other things wiſe enough, do uſually miſcarry; in putting off the making of their wills, and their repentance, 'till it be too late. Men had need then be of ſound underſtanding, and perfect memory, when they ſet about matters of ſo great conſequence in reſpect of their temporal and eternal concernments: eſpecially when men have the happineſs of all eternity to take care of, and provide for, they had need have their underſtandings about them, and all the advantages of leiſure and conſideration, to make a ſober reflexion upon their paſt lives, and make up their accounts with God, and to ſet all things right between him and them; and it is well if, after all, a repentance wilfully deferred ſo long, ſo ſhort and imperfect, ſo confuſed and huddled up, will at laſt be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miſcarriages of a long life.

(4.) Suppoſe thou wert ſure to repent before thou leaveſt the world, and to do this work throughly, which no man can promiſe to himſelf, that deliberately delays it; yet this can be no reaſonable encouragement to go on in an evil courſe, becauſe we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treaſure up much more ſorrow and affliction to ourſelves againſt the day of repentance, and conſequently ſin on, in hopes of being hereafter ſo much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done; as if a man ſhould go on to break the laws, in hopes of a more ſevere and exemplary puniſhment: ſure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reaſonable and conſiderate man.

Laſtly, As to the encouragement which men take from the ſudden repentance of great criminals and malefactors, and their dying with ſo much comfort and aſſurance; if this be well conſidered, there is little comfort to be fetched from ſuch examples. For,

1ſt. Though a ſincere repentance in ſuch circumſtances be poſſible; yet it is almoſt impoſſible for the party himſelf concerned, much more for others, upon any good ground, to judge when it is ſincere. God, who knows the hearts of men, and whether if they had lived longer, they would, in the future courſe of their lives, have juſtified and made good their repentance and good reſolutions, only knows the ſincerity of it.

But, *2dly*, No certain judgment is to be made for the comfort and confidence of the party concerned; for the buſineſs is not, what comfort and confidence men have, but, what ground they have for it: and whereas men are apt piouſly to ſuppoſe that ſo extraordinary a comfort and aſſurance is wrought in them by the Spirit of God, nothing is more uncertain; becauſe we ſometimes ſee thoſe who give no ſuch teſtimony of their repentance, to die with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident perſuaſion of their ſalvation, as thoſe that do. But this, certainly, is not from the Spirit of God: a natural obſtinacy and courage may carry men a great way; and falſe and miſtaken principles may fill men, for the preſent, with as much comfort and confidence as well-grounded hopes. In the church of *Rome*, great numbers of thoſe who have led very wicked lives, after a formal confeſſion and abſolution, and ſome good words of encouragement from the prieſt, die as full of peace and comfort, to all appearance, as the beſt of men.

Indeed, it is very natural to men who find themſelves in a deſperate condition, to be ſtrangely elevated and raiſed, upon any hopes given of eſcaping ſo great a danger as they apprehend themſelves to be in; eſpecially if theſe hopes be given them by a grave man, of whoſe piety and judgment they have a venerable opinion. When men have the ſentence of death in themſelves, as all wicked livers muſt have, they are naturally apt to be over-joyed at the unexpected news of a pardon.

To ſpeak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which ſome have, upon a ſudden repentance for great and flagrant crimes; becauſe I cannot diſcern any ſufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehenſion of their condition, next almoſt to deſpair of it, would much better become them; becauſe their caſe is really ſo very doubtful in itſelf. There is great reaſon for the repentance of ſuch perſons, and it becomes them well; but I ſee very little reaſon for their great comfort and confidence, nor does it become their circumſtances and condition. Let them exerciſe as deep repentance as is poſſible, and *bring forth all the fruits meet for it* that are poſſible in ſo ſhort a time: let them humble themſelves before God, and pray inceſſantly to him day and night for mercy; make all the reparation they can, for the injuries they have done, by confeſſion, and acknowledgment, and by making ſatiſfaction to the parties injured, if it be in their power; by giving alms to the poor, by warning others, and endeavouring to reclaim them to a better mind, and courſe of life; and for the reſt humbly commit themſelves to the mercy of God, in Jeſus Chriſt; let them imitate, as near as they can, the behaviour of the penitent thief, the only example the ſcripture has left us of a late repentance that proved effectual, who gave the greateſt teſtimony that could be of a penitent ſorrow for his ſins, and of his faith in the Saviour of the world, by a generous and courageous owning of him in the midſt of his diſgrace and ſuffering, when even his own diſciples had denied and forſaken him: but we do not find in him any ſigns of extraordinary comfort, much leſs of confidence, but he humbly commended himſelf to the mercy and goodneſs of his Saviour, ſaying, *Lord, remember me when thou comeſt into thy kingdom.*

SERMON XCVIII.

The Long-ſuffering of GOD.

ECCLES. VIII. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.

I HAVE conſidered how apt men are to abuſe the *long-ſuffering* of God, to the hardening and encouraging of themſelves in ſin, and when this comes to paſs; where I conſidered the ſeveral falſe concluſions which ſinners draw from the delay of puniſhment, as if there were no God, or providence, or difference of good and evil; or elſe, as is more commonly pretended, that ſin is not ſo great an evil, and that God is not ſo highly offended at it, or that God is not ſo ſevere as he is repreſented; that the puniſhment of ſin is not ſo certain, or, however, it is at a diſtance, and may be prevented by a future repentance: all which I have ſpoken fully to, and endeavoured to ſhew the fallacy and unreaſonableneſs of them. I ſhall now proceed to the

Third and laſt thing I propounded, which was, To anſwer an objection, to which this diſcourſe may ſeem liable; and that is this: If the long-ſuffering of God be the occaſion of mens hardneſs and impenitency, then why is God ſo patient to ſinners, when they are ſo prone to abuſe his goodneſs and patience? And how is it goodneſs in God to forbear ſinners ſo long, when this forbearance of his is ſo apt to miniſter to them an occaſion of their farther miſchief, and greater ruin? It ſhould ſeem according to this, that it would be much greater mercy to the greateſt part of ſinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but inſtantly, upon the firſt occaſion and provocation, to cut them off, and ſo to put a ſtop to their wickedneſs, and to hinder them from making themſelves more miſerable, by increaſing their guilt, and *treaſuring up wrath to themſelves againſt the day of wrath.*

This is the objection; and becauſe it ſeems to be of ſome weight, I ſhall endeavour to return a ſatisfactory anſwer to it, in theſe following particulars. And,

I. I aſk the ſinner if he will ſtand to this; Art thou ſerious, and wouldeſt thou in good earneſt have God to deal thus with thee, to take the very firſt advantage to deſtroy thee, or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miſerable beyond all hopes of recovery? Conſider of it again. Doſt thou think it deſirable, that God ſhall deal thus with thee, and let fly his judgments upon thee ſo ſoon as ever thou haſt ſinned? If not, why do men trifle, and make an objection againſt the long-ſuffering of God, which they would be very loth ſhould be made good upon them?

II. It is likewiſe to be conſidered, that the long-ſuffering of God toward ſinners, is not a total forbearance: it is uſually ſo mix'd with afflictions and judgments of one kind or other, upon ourſelves or others, as to be a ſufficient warning to us, if we would conſider and lay it to heart, to *ſin no more, leſt a worſe thing come upon us*: leſt that judgment which we ſaw inflicted upon others, come home to us. And is not this great goodneſs, to warn us, when he might deſtroy us? to leave room for a retreat, when he might put our caſe paſt remedy?

All this time of God's patience, he threatens ſinners, to awaken them out of their ſecurity; he puniſheth them gently, that we may have no ground to hope for impunity; he makes examples of ſome in a more ſevere and remarkable manner, that others *may hear, and fear*, and be afraid to commit the like ſins, leſt the like puniſhment overtake them; he whips ſome offenders before your eyes, to ſhew us what ſin deſerves, and what we alſo may juſtly expect, if we do the ſame thing: And will nothing be a warning to us, but our own ſufferings!

Nay, God doth uſually ſend ſome judgment or other upon every ſinner in this life; he lets him feel the rod, that he may know that it is *an evil and bitter thing to ſin againſt him.* He exerciſeth men with many afflictions and croſſes, and diſappointments, which their own conſciences tell them are the juſt recompences of their deeds; and by theſe lighter ſtrokes, he gives us a merciful warning to avoid his heavier blows; when mercy alone will not work upon us and win us, but being *fed to the full, we grow wanton* and fooliſh, he adminiſters phyſick to us by affliction, and by adverſity endeavours to bring us to conſideration and a ſober mind; and many have been cured this way, and the judgments of God have done them that good, which his mercies and bleſſings could not; for God would ſave us any way, by his mercy or by his judgment, by ſickneſs or by health, by plenty or by want, by what we deſire, or by what we dread; ſo deſirous is he of our repentance and happineſs, that he leaves no method unattempted that may probably do us good; he ſtrikes upon every paſſion in the heart of man; he works upon our love by his goodneſs, upon our hopes by his promiſes, and upon our fears, firſt by his threatnings, and if they be not effectual, then by his judgments; he tries every affection, and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himſelf; and will nothing warn us, but what will ruin us, and render our caſe deſperate and paſt hope!

And if any ſinner be free from outward afflictions and ſufferings, yet ſin never fails to carry its own puniſhmeut along with it; there is a ſecret ſting and worm, a divine *Nemeſis* and revenge that is bred in the bowels of every ſin, and makes it a heavy puniſhment to it ſelf; the conſcience of a ſinner doth frequently torment him, and his guilt haunts and dogs him where-ever he goes; for whenever a man commits a known and wilful ſin, he drinks down poiſon, which though it may work ſlowly, yet it will give him many a gripe, and, if no means be uſed to expel it, will deſtroy him at laſt.

So that the long-ſuffering of God is wiſely ordered, and there is ſuch a mixture of judgments in it, as is ſufficient to awaken ſinners, and much more apt to deter them from ſin, than to encourage them to go on and continue in it.

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of God than to harden men by his long-ſuffering. This the ſcripture moſt expreſly declares, 2 *Pet.* iii. 9. *He is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance.* He hath a very gracious and merciful deſign in his patience towards ſinners, and is therefore good, that he may make us ſo, and that we may ceaſe to do evil. The event of God's long-ſuffering may, by our own fault and abuſe of it, prove our ruin; but the deſign and intention of it is our repentance. *He winks at the ſins of men* (ſaith the ſon of *Syrach*) *that they may repent.* He paſſeth them by, and does not take ſpeedy vengeance upon ſinners for them, that they may have time to repent of them, and *to make their peace with them, while they are yet in the way.*

Nay, his long-ſuffering doth not only give ſpace for repentance, but is a great argument and encouragement to it. That he is ſo loth to ſurprize ſinners, that he gives them the liberty of ſecond thoughts, time to reflect upon themſelves, to conſider what they have done, and to retract it by repentance, is a ſufficient intimation that he hath no mind to ruin us, that *he deſires not the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedueſs and live.* And ſhould not this goodneſs of his make us ſorry that we have offended him? Doth it not naturally lead and invite us to repentance? What other interpretation can we make of his patience, what other uſe in reaſon ſhould we make of it, but to repent and return that we may be ſaved?

IV. There is nothing in the long-ſuffering of God, that is in truth any ground of encouragement to men in an evil courſe; the proper and natural tendency of *God's goodneſs is to lead men to repentance,* and by repentance to bring them to happineſs; *Rom.* ii. 4. *Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and patience, and long-ſuffering, not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?* This St. *Peter,* with relation to theſe very words of St. *Paul,* interprets, *leading to ſalvation;* 2 Pet. iii. 15. *And account that the long-ſuffering of our Lord is ſalvation, as our beloved brother Paul alſo hath written unto you.* Now where did St. *Paul* write ſo, unleſs in this text; *Not knowing that the goodneſs of God leads to repentance?* It is not only great ignorance, and a very groſs miſtake, to think that it is the deſign and intention of God's patience and long-ſuffering to encourage men in ſin; but likewiſe to think, that in the nature of the thing, goodneſs can have any tendency to make men evil; *not knowing that the goodneſs of God leads to repentance.*

V. That through the long-ſuffering of God ſinners are hardened in their evil ways, is wholly to be aſcribed to their abuſe of God's goodneſs; it is neither the end and intention, nor the proper and natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event of it through our own fault. And is this any real objection againſt the long-ſuffering of God? May not God be patient, though ſinners be impenitent? May not he be good, though we be ſo fooliſh as to make an ill uſe of his goodneſs? Becauſe men are apt to abuſe the mercies and favours of God, is it therefore a fault in him to beſtow them upon us? Is it not enough for us to abuſe them, but will we challenge God alſo of unkindneſs in giving them? May not God uſe wiſe and fitting means for our recovery, becauſe we are ſo fooliſh as not to make a wiſe uſe of them? And muſt he be charged with our ruin, becauſe he ſeeks by all means to prevent it? Is it not enough to be injurious to our ſelves, but will we be unthankful to God alſo? When God hath laid out *the riches of his goodneſs and patience* upon ſinners, will they challenge him as acceſſary to their ruin? As if a fooliſh heir, that hath prodigally waſted the fair eſtate that was left him, ſhould be ſo far from blaming himſelf, as to charge his father with undoing him. Are theſe the beſt returns which the infinite mercy and patience of God hath deſerved from us? *Do we thus requite the Lord, fooliſh people and unwiſe!*

God's patience would ſave ſinners, but they ruin themſelves by their abuſe of it: let the blame then lie where it is due, and let God have the glory of his goodneſs, though men refuſe the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. And Laſtly, But becauſe this objection pincheth hardeſt in one point, *viz.* that God certainly foreſees that a great many will abuſe his long-ſuffering, to the increaſing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is long-ſuffering any mercy and goodneſs to thoſe, who he certainly fore-knows will in the event be ſo much the more miſerable, for having had ſo much patience extended to them? Therefore, for a full anſwer, I deſire theſe *ſix* things may be conſidered.

1. That God deſigns this life for the trial of our obedience, that according as we behave our ſelves, he may reward or puniſh us in another world.

2. That there could be no trial of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and puniſhments, but upon the ſuppoſition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and neceſſity, but upon free choice.

3. That God, by virtue of the infinite perfection of his knowledge, does clearly and certainly foreſee all future events, even thoſe which are moſt contingent, ſuch as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary agents. This I know hath been denied, but without reaſon; ſince it is not only contrary to the common apprehenſions of mankind, from the very light of nature, that God ſhould not foreknow future events, but to clear and expreſs ſcripture; and that in ſuch inſtances, for the ſake of which they deny God's fore-knowledge, in general, of the future actions of free and voluntary agents; I mean, that the ſcripture expreſly declares God's determinate fore-knowledge of the moſt wicked actions; as the crucifying of Chriſt, who is ſaid, *according to the determinate counſel and fore-knowledge of God,* to have been *by wicked hands crucified and ſlain.*

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the ſight and knowledge of things preſent hath upon them to make them to be preſent. I may ſee or know that the ſun is riſen, without being the cauſe of its riſing; and no more is bare knowledge of future events the cauſe that they are when they are. And if any man aſk, how God can certainly fore-know things, which depend upon free and arbitrary cauſes, unleſs he do ſome way decree and determine them? I anſwer, that this is not a fair and reaſonable demand to aſk of men, who have but finite underſtandings, to make out and declare all the ways that infinite knowledge hath of knowing and of fore-ſeeing the actions of free creatures, without prejudice to their liberty and freedom of acting. However, it is of the two, much more credible to reaſon, that infinite knowledge ſhould certainly fore-know things, which our underſtandings

cannot imagine how they ſhould be fore-known, than that God ſhould any ways be the author of ſin, by determining and decreeing the wicked actions of men. The firſt only argues the imperfection of our underſtanding; but the other lays the greateſt blemiſh and imperfection that can be upon the divine nature.

So that this difficult controverſy about the fore-knowledge of God is brought to this point, whether a man had better believe that infinite knowledge may be able to fore-know things in a way which our finite underſtanding cannot comprehend; or to aſcribe ſomething to God, from whence it would unavoidably follow, that he is the author of ſin. The firſt is only a modeſt and juſt acknowledgment of our own ignorance, the laſt is the utmoſt and greateſt abſurdity that a man can be brought to; and to ſay that we cannot believe the fore-knowledge of God, unleſs we can make out the particular manner of it, is more unreaſonable than if an ignorant man ſhould deny a difficult propoſition in *Euclid* or *Archimedes* to be demonſtrated, becauſe he knows not how to demonſtrate it.

5. And conſequently fore-knowledge and liberty may very well conſiſt; and notwithſtanding God's fore-knowledge of what men will do, they may be as free as if he did not fore-know it. And,

Laſtly, That God doth not deal with men according to his fore-knowledge of the good or bad uſe of their liberty, but according to the nature and reaſon of things; and therefore if he be long-ſuffering toward ſinners, and do not cut them off upon the firſt provocation, but give them a ſpace and opportunity of repentance, and uſe all proper means and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford his grace to excite good reſolutions in them, and to ſecond and aſſiſt them, and they refuſe and reſiſt all this; their wilful obſtinacy and impenitency is as culpable, and God's goodneſs and patience as much to be acknowledged, as if God did not fore-ſee the abuſe of it; becauſe his fore-ſight and knowledge of what they would do, laid no neceſſity upon them to do what they did.

If a prince had the privilege of fore-knowledge, as God hath, and did certainly fore-ſee, that a great many of his ſubjects would certainly incur the penalty of his laws, and that others would abuſe his goodneſs and clemency to them; yet, if he would govern them like free and reaſonable creatures, he ought to make the ſame wiſe laws to reſtrain their exorbitancy, and to uſe the ſame clemency in all caſes that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all fore-ſee what they would do, nor how they would abuſe his clemency; for it is nevertheleſs fit to make wiſe and reaſonable laws, and to govern with equity and clemency, though it were certainly fore-ſeen that they that are governed would act very fooliſhly and unreaſonably in the uſe of their liberty. It is great goodneſs in God to give men the means and opportunity of being ſaved, though they abuſe his goodneſs to their farther ruin; and he may be heartily grieved for that folly and obſtinacy in men, which he certainly fore-ſees will end in their ruin; and may with great ſeriouſneſs and ſincerity wiſh they would do otherwiſe, and were as *wiſe to do good*, as they are *wilful to do evil.* And thus he is repreſented in ſcripture, as regretting the miſchief which men wilfully bring upon themſelves; *O that they were wiſe! O that they would underſtand, and conſider their latter end!*

And this is ſufficient to vindicate the goodneſs of God in his patience and long-ſuffering to ſinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befals them for their wilful contempt and abuſe of it.

I ſhall draw ſome inferences from this whole diſcourſe upon this argument.

I. This ſhews the unreaſonableneſs and perverſe diſingenuity of men, who take occaſion to harden and encourage themſelves in ſin from the long-ſuffering of God, which above all things in the world ſhould melt and ſoften them. Thou haſt ſinned, and art liable to the juſtice of God; ſentence is gone forth, but God reſpites the execution of it, and hath granted thee a reprieve, and time and opportunity to ſue out thy pardon. Now what uſe ought we in reaſon to make of this patience of God towards us? We ought certainly *to break off our ſins by* a ſpeedy *repentance, leſt iniquity be our ruin*; immediately to ſue out our pardon, and *to make our peace with God, while we are yet in the way*, and to reſolve, never any more willingly to offend that God who is ſo gracious and merciful, ſo long-ſuffering and full of compaſſion. But what uſe do men commonly make of it? They take occaſion to confirm and ſtrengthen themſelves in their wickedneſs, and to reaſon themſelves into vain and groundleſs hopes of impunity. Now what a folly is this, becauſe puniſhment doth not come, therefore to haſten it, and to draw it down upon ourſelves? Becauſe it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Becauſe there is yet a poſſibility of eſcaping it, therefore to take a certain courſe to make it unavoidable? Becauſe there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our caſe deſperate and paſt remedy? See how unreaſonably men bring ruin upon themſelves; ſo that well might the Pſalmiſt aſk that queſtion, *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?*

But their folly and unreaſonableneſs is not ſo great, but their perverſeneſs and diſingenuity is greater. To ſin, becauſe God is long-ſuffering, is *to be evil, becauſe he is good*, and to provoke him, becauſe he ſpares us: it is to *ſtrive with God*, and to contend with his goodneſs, as if we were reſolved to try the utmoſt length of his patience; and becauſe God is loth to puniſh, therefore to urge and importune him to that which is ſo contrary to his inclination.

II. This may ſerve to convince men of the great evil and danger of thus abuſing the long-ſuffering of God. It is a provocation of the higheſt nature, becauſe it is to trample upon his deareſt attributes, thoſe which he moſt delights and glories in, his goodneſs and mercy; for the long-ſuffering of God is his goodneſs to the guilty, and his mercy to thoſe who deſerve to be miſerable.

Nothing makes our ruin more certain, more ſpeedy and more intollerable, than the abuſe of God's goodneſs and patience. After God had borne long with that rebellious people, the children of *Iſrael*, and notwithſtanding all their murmurings, all their infidelity and impenitency, had ſpared them *ten times*, at laſt he ſets his ſeal to their ruin, *Heb.* iii. 8, 9. *Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderneſs: When your fathers proved me, and ſaw my works, forty years.* This was a high provocation indeed, to harden their hearts under the patience and long-ſuffering of God, after forty years trial and experience of it; *Verſe* 10. *Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and ſaid, They are a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways.* And what was the iſſue of all this? Upon this God takes up a fixed reſolution to bear no longer with them, but to cut them off from the bleſſings he had promiſed to beſtow upon them; *He ſware in his wrath that they ſhould not enter into his reſt. To whom ſware he, that they ſhould not enter into his reſt, but to them that believed not?* Or as the word may be rendered, *to them that were diſobedient?* That is to them who went on in their rebellion againſt him, after he had *ſuffered their manners forty years.*

And as the abuſe of God's patience renders our deſtruction more certain, ſo more ſpeedy and more intollerable. We think that becauſe God ſuffers long, he will ſuffer always; and becauſe puniſhment is delayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come the ſooner for this: So our Lord tells us, *Luke* xij. When *the ſervant ſaid, His Lord delayed his coming; the Lord of that ſervant ſhall come in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and ſhall cut him in ſunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.* None ſo like to be ſurprized by the judgment of God, as thoſe who treſpaſs ſo boldly upon his patience.

III. To perſuade us to make a right uſe of the patience and long-ſuffering of God, and to comply with the merciful end and deſign of God therein.

1. It is the deſign of God's long-ſuffering, to give us a ſpace of repentance. Were it not that God had this deſign and reaſonable expectation from us, he would not reprieve a ſinner for one moment, but would execute his judgments upon him, ſo ſoon as ever he had offended. This our Saviour declares to us by the parable of the fig-tree, *Luke* xiii. 6. Were it not that God expects from us the fruit of repentance, he would *cut us down*, and not ſuffer us *to cumber the ground:* after he had *waited three years, ſeeking fruit and finding none, he ſpares it one year more, to ſee if it would bear fruit.*

2. The long-ſuffering of God is a great encouragement to repentance. We ſee by his patience that he is not ready to take advantage againſt us; that he ſpares us when we offend, is a very good ſign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus natural light would reaſon; and ſo the king of *Nineveh*, a heathen, reaſons, *Who can tell if God will turn and repent?* But we are fully aſſured of this by the gra-

cious declarations of the goſpel, and the way of pardon and forgiveneſs, which is therein eſtabliſhed *through faith in the blood* of Jeſus Chriſt, who was made a *propitiation for the ſins of the whole world.*

Therefore the long-ſuffering of God ſhould be a powerful argument to us, *to break off our ſins by repentance:* For this is the end of God's patience; *He is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance. He hath no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked ſhould turn from his way and live.* God every where expreſſeth a vehement deſire and earneſt expectation of our repentance and converſion. *Jer.* iv. 14. *O Jeruſalem! waſh thy heart from wickedneſs, that thou mayeſt be ſaved.* And *Chap.* xiii. 27. *Wo unto thee Jeruſalem! wilt thou be made clean? when ſhall it once be?* He who is ſo patient as to the puniſhment of our ſins, is almoſt impatient of our repentance for them; *Wilt thou be made clean? when ſhall it once be?* And can we ſtand out againſt his earneſt deſire of our happineſs, whom we have ſo often and ſo long provoked to make us miſerable?

Let us then return into ourſelves, and think ſeriouſly what our caſe and condition is; how we have lived, and how long the patience of God hath *ſuffered our manners,* and waited for our repentance, and how inevitable and intollerable the miſery of thoſe muſt be who live and die in the contempt and abuſe of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked lives, and ſay, *What have we done?* How careleſs have we been of our own happineſs, and what pains have we taken to undo our ſelves!

Let us ſpeedily ſet about this work, becauſe we do not know how long the patience of God may laſt, and the opportunities of our ſalvation be continued to us. This day of God's grace and patience will have an end; therefore as the prophet exhorts, *Iſa.* lv. 6. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.* Now God graciouſly invites ſinners to come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them *depart from him*; when they ſhall cry, *Lord, Lord, open unto us,* and *the door of* mercy *ſhall be ſhut* againſt them.

All the while thou delayeſt this neceſſary work, thou ventureſt thy immortal ſoul, and putteſt thy eternal ſalvation upon a deſperate hazard; and ſhould God ſnatch thee ſuddenly away in an impenitent ſtate, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and God is yet reconcileable, but death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the beſt thy life is uncertain, and death will infallibly put a period to this day of God's grace and patience.

Repentance is a work ſo neceſſary, that methinks no man ſhould loſe ſo much time as to deliberate, whether he ſhould ſet about it or not; *De neceſſariis nulla eſt deliberatio*; *No man deliberates about what he muſt do, or be undone if he do it not.* It is a work of ſo great conſequence and concernment, and the delay of it ſo infinitely dangerous that one would think no wiſe man could entertain a thought of deferring it. What greater folly and ſtupidity can there be, than for men to venture their immortal ſouls, and to run an apparent hazard in matters of everlaſting conſequence!

This day of God's patience is the great opportunity of our ſalvation; and if we let it ſlip, it is never to be recovered: If we miſ-improve this time of our life, we ſhall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our ſtate of trial ends with this life; after that God will prove us no more; then we ſhall wiſh, *O that I had known, in that my day, the things which belonged to my peace! but now they are hid from mine eyes: Therefore to day, whilſt it is called to day, harden not yonr hearts, make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for ſuddenly ſhall the wrath of the Lord break forth, and in thy ſecurity thou ſhalt be deſtroyed. Exerciſe repentance in the time of health, and defer not till death to be juſtified.*

SERMON XCIX.

The Power of God.

PSAL. LXII. 11.

God hath ſpoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.

IN treating of the attributes of God, I have conſidered thoſe which relate to the divine *underſtanding*, to which I referred his *Knowledge* and *Wiſdom*; thoſe alſo which relate to the divine *will*; *viz.* God's Juſtice, Truth, Holineſs, and Goodneſs: I come now to conſider his *Power of acting*, which is his *Omnipotency*; this I ſhall ſpeak to from theſe words.

In the beginning of this Pſalm, *David* declares that God was the great object of his truſt and confidence, and that all his hopes and expectation of ſafety and deliverance were from him, *ver.* 1, 2. And this makes him challenge his enemies for all their miſchievous qualities and devices againſt him, as vain attempts, *ver.* 3, 4. Hereupon he chargeth himſelf to continue his truſt and confidence in God, from whom was all his expectation, and who was able to ſave and deliver him, *ver.* 5, 6, 7. And from his example and experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to truſt in God, *ver.* 8. and that from two aguments.

1. Becauſe all other objects of our truſt and confidence are vain and inſufficient, and will fail thoſe that rely upon them. If we will rely upon any thing in this world, it muſt either be *perſons* or *things*; but we cannot ſafely repoſe our truſt in either of theſe. Not in *perſons:* They may be reduced to one of theſe two heads, either high or low: Thoſe that are of a mean condition, it would be in vain to truſt them; they that cannot ſecure themſelves from meanneſs, cannot ſecure others from miſchief, *Men of low degree are vanity:* But the great ones of the world, they ſeem to promiſe ſomething of aſſiſtance and ſecurity to us; but if we depend upon them, they will fruſtrate us, *Men of high degree are a lie.* As for the *things* of the world, that which men uſually place their confidence in, is riches; theſe are either got by unlawful, or lawful means; if they be ill gotten, by oppreſſion or robbery, they will be ſo far from ſecuring us from evil, that they will bring it upon us; if they be well gotten, they are of an uncertain nature, that we have little reaſon to place our hopes in them; *If riches increaſe, ſet not your hearts upon them*, that is, your hope; for *heart* in ſcripture ſignifies any of the affections.

2. Becauſe God is the proper object of our truſt and confidence. We may ſafely rely upon any one, in whom theſe two things concur, a power to help us, and goodneſs to incline him ſo to do. Now *David* tells us, that both theſe are eminently in God, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him; *Power*, ver 11. and *goodneſs*, ver. 12.

I ſhall ſpeak to that which *David* makes the firſt ground of our confidence, *the Power of God*; *power belongs to God*: For which he brings the teſtimony of God himſelf *once hath God ſpoken, yea twice have I heard this.* Some interpreters trouble themſelves about the meaning of this expreſſion, as if it did refer to ſome particular revelation of God; and then again, they are troubled how to reconcile God's ſpeaking this but once, with *David's* hearing it twice: But I do not love to ſpy myſteries in thoſe expreſſions, which are capable of a plain ſenſe; for I underſtand no more by it but this, that God hath ſeveral times revealed this; he frequently declared himſelf by this attribute *once, yea twice*; that is, he hath *ſpoken it often*, and *David* had *heard it often.* This is anſwerable to that phraſe of the *Latins*, *Semel atque iterum*; and it is uſual in all writers, to uſe a certain number for an uncertain, and particularly among poets, *Felices ter & amplius.* Hor. And ſo in the poetical writers of ſcripture, *Job.* v. 19. he hath *delivered thee in ſix* *troubles, yea, in ſeven there ſhall no evil touch thee*; that is, in ſeveral and various troubles. *Eccleſ.* xi. 2. *Give a portion to ſeven, and alſo to eight*; That is, diſtribute thy charity to many; and which is neareſt to this, *Job* xl. 5. *Once have I ſpoken, but I will not anſwer*; *yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther*; that is, I have had ſeveral diſcourſes with my friends; and xxxiii. 14. *God ſpeaketh once, yea, twice, in a dream, in a viſion of the night*; that is, God reveals himſelf in ſeveral ways and manners to men; ſo here, *God hath ſpoken once, yea twice*, that is, God hath often declared this. And if I would be ſo curious to refer to a particular declaration of God, I ſhould think, that it related either to the preface to the law, *I am the Lord thy God*, that is, the great and powerful God, *that brought thee out of the land of Egypt*; or rather to the declaration which God made of himſelf to *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*, by the name of *the Almighty God*, Gen. xvii. 1. Concerning which revelation of God, it is ſaid expreſly, *Exod.* vi. 3. *I appeared unto Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, by the name of God Almighty*; *but by my name Jehovah, was I not known to them.*

But that which I deſign to ſpeak to is the propoſition it ſelf, that *power belongs to God*; that is, that the excellency of power, power in its higheſt degree and perfection; *all power belongs to God*, that is, that *omnipotence* is a property or perfection of the divine nature.

In the handling of this, I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the *omnipotence* of God.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God.

Firſt, What we are to underſtand by the *omnipotence* of God. And this I ſhall conſider,

I. As to the *principle*. And

II. As to the *exerciſe* of it.

I. As to the principle, it is an ability to do all things, the doing of which ſpeaks power and perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of God; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer; an ability to do all things which are conſiſtent with it ſelf and with the divine nature and perfection; by which we muſt mean an executive power, the effect whereof is without himſelf; for what he is ſaid to do within himſelf, the acts of his underſtanding and will, as we conceive his will to be diſtinct from his power, are not to be referred to his *omnipotence*. To have a right conception of *omnipotence*, we muſt imagine the moſt perfect active principle that we can, and it is ſtill ſomething more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our conception,

1. Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly ſubject and ſubordinate.

2. A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any conſiderable, much leſs effectual reſiſtance, which can check and countermand at pleaſure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine beſides this; becauſe we cannot imagine any other power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a moſt perfect manner, and can do all things at once, and in an inſtant, and that with eaſe. We can but do one thing at once; and the greater and more conſiderable it is, the more time it will aſk us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done: but God, to whoſe knowledge all things are preſent at once, and together, and the acts of whoſe will are as quick and perfect as of his underſtanding, hath a power anſwerable to the perfection of both; and therefore it is as eaſy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as ſucceſſively, and in time. For this is the priviledge of an infinite ſpirit, that it does not only act without hands and material engines or inſtruments, as every ſpirit doth, but without motion from one place to another, becauſe he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing elſe but a *willing* that ſuch a thing be done, and, *ipſo facto*, every thing is ſo, as he wills it ſhould be, and when he wills it ſhould be; as if things did ſtart up into being, or vaniſh out of being, as if they

did break forth into being, and ſculk again into nothing, and undergo ſuch and ſuch changes, *ad nutum voluntatis, at the beck of his will.* And this is the moſt perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the ſcripture ſeems to expreſs to us, when it repreſents God as *making things by his word, upholding all things by the word of his power*; as if he did but *ſpeak the word*, and ſay, *Let ſuch a thing be, and it was ſo*; as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an *expreſs act* of the divine *will*, which is all we can underſtand by God's *ſpeaking*, by his *word*, and *voice*, and *ſaying*, *Let things be*; but the leaſt that it can ſignify, is the quick and ſpeedy manner of working, whereby God is able to do things in an inſtant, as ſoon as a word can be ſpoken.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an inſtant; ſo with eaſe, without any pain or laborious endeavour; for what is it that can object any difficulty to him? At the firſt creation of things, there was nothing to reſiſt him; and ſince the creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and conſequently all, whoſe power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is ſubject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the infinite power of God; ſo that we may imagine the divine power would paſs through all the reſiſtance that all created power can make, and all the difficulties it can object to it, with more eaſe than a bullet paſſeth through the thin air, or a man would paſs through a net of cobweb.

5. The moſt perfect active principle we can imagine, the utmoſt bounds and limits of whoſe perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the *omnipotence* of God as to the *principle*, which hath no bounds and limits. And,

II. As to the *exerciſe* of it, it is only limited by the divine will and wiſdom. The divine will determines it to its exerciſe, the divine wiſdom directs, and regulates the exerciſe of it; that is, God exerciſeth his power willingly, and not by neceſſity, and in ſuch manner, for the producing ſuch effects, and in order to ſuch ends and purpoſes, as ſeem beſt to his wiſdom. Hence he is ſaid *to act all things according to his good pleaſure*, and *according to the counſel of his will*; *that is, freely and wiſely.*

As to the *extent* of this power, I ſaid it was an ability to do all things that are conſiſtent with it ſelf, and with the nature and perfection of God.

Firſt, That are conſiſtent with it ſelf, that is, with a power to do all things. It is a contradiction to imagine, that *omnipotence* can do that, which if it could be done, would render all power inſignificant. Upon this account, the divine power is not ſaid to extend to the working of any thing which implies a contradiction, and the terms whereof ſpeak a repugnancy to one another, and mutually deſtoy one another, and the doing whereof is contrary to the nature of the thing which is ſuppoſed to be done, that is, is nonſenſe, and cannot be imagined to be. For example, that a thing ſhould be, and not be at the ſame time. For a power to make a thing to be, ſo as it ſhould not be while it is, ſignifies nothing, becauſe ſuch a being as is not, is nothing; and to make ſuch a being, would be to do nothing, and conſequently ſuch a power would ſignify nothing. So likewiſe we cannot ſay, That the divine power can cauſe that the ſame thing ſhould be made and not be made; that that which hath been, ſhould not have been; for the power which makes a thing, ſo as that it was not made, and cauſeth a thing to have been, ſo as that it hath not been, does nothing; and conſequently is no power. Nor can we ſay, That the divine power can effect that any thing ſhould be made by it ſelf, that is, be the cauſe of its own being; for that would be to cauſe that a thing ſhould be before it is, that is, be when it is not, which ſignifies nothing. We cannot ſay, That the divine power can effect, that twice two ſhould not make four; for that would be to cauſe that things ſhould not be what they are, if they be at all; which is to cauſe that things ſhould be, and not be at all, when they are, which amounts to nothing.

We cannot ſay, The divine power can make a ſound to be ſeen, and colour to be heard; for that would be to make colour and ſound all one; that is, things that differ, to be the ſame while they differ, which is to make colour and ſound not to be colour and ſound while they are ſo; which is to do nothing, and conſequently argues no power.

We cannot ſay, that the divine power can make that which is intrinſically and eſſentially good to be evil; and on the contrary: Or that which is neceſſarily true to be falſe; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinſically and eſſentially good to be evil, is to make that which is always good to be ſometimes evil; that is, to be evil whilſt it is good, that is, to make good and evil all one; which is to bring two things together, which ſo ſoon as they do exiſt, deſtroy one another, which is to no purpoſe, becauſe it is to do juſt nothing; and there is the ſame reaſon of true and falſe.

We cannot ſay, that the power of God can cauſe that the ſame thing ſhould be hot and cold, dead and alive at the ſame time, becauſe theſe deſtroy one another; and if they were both, neither of them would be, and ſo the effect we attribute to this power would be nothing.

We cannot ſay, that the divine power can effect that the ſame impreſſion ſhould give a thing two contrary motions, upward and downward, at the ſame time; that the ſame body ſhould be in two contrary poſtures, in motion and at reſt, and in ſeveral places, which are the *contradictions* of *tranſubſtantiation*; for, the ſame body to be at the ſame time in two ſeveral places, is to be limited and circumſcribed by each of theſe, that is, ſo to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other; ſo that if it be in this place, it is not in that, nor in any other beſides this; if it be in that place, it is not in this, nor any other beſides that; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and therefore in neither of them, nor any where elſe; ſo that a power to make a body to be in two places at once, is a power to make it to be no where, that is, not to be at all, which is no power; and there is the ſame reaſon of the ſame bodies being in contrary motion, or in motion and at reſt, or in two contrary poſtures at the ſame time.

So that by all theſe inſtances, it appears, that a power to do any thing which implies a contradiction, and is repugnant to the nature of things, ſignifies nothing; and the ſuppoſed effect of it is only to bring terms together, which, if they could be brought together, ſo ſoon as they meet, will mutually take away and deſtroy one another, which would be vain, and to no purpoſe.

I have the more explicitly laid open theſe contradictions, with relation to the groſs doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*, in which all, or moſt of the contradictions which I have mentioned, are involved. I know they ſtiffly deny, that theſe contradictions follow from that doctrine, and uſe pitiful ſhifts to avoid them; but being not able to ſatisfy themſelves that way, if the worſt ſhould come to the worſt, they can grant theſe contradictions, but then they fly to *the power of God*, which can do things which we call contradictions; or elſe they ſay, there are as many contradictions in the doctrine of the *Trinity*, which all chriſtians believe. And thus they reproach *chriſtianity* to defend *popery*; and if they cannot perſuade men to be *Papiſts*, do what they can to make them *Atheiſts*, or at leaſt to hinder them from being *Chriſtians*; but there is not ſo much malice in this objection, but there is as little ſtrength. Is it any contradiction, that the ſame thing ſhould be *three* and *one* in *ſeveral reſpects?* which is all that the ſcripture teacheth concerning the *Trinity:* But if men will undertake to explain this more particularly than God thought fit to do, and do it in ſuch a manner, as that they cannot free themſelves from contradiction, let them look to it, the chriſtian religion is not at all concerned in this farther than to cenſure ſuch mens boldneſs and curioſity.

But againſt this exemption of things that imply a contradiction from the compaſs and extent of the divine power, there are *two* objections which are more conſiderable, and deſerve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant God's fore-knowledge of future events, which ſeem to us to be impoſſible to be fore-known. Now, why may we not as well grant that God can do things which ſeem to us impoſſible to be done by any other power, as fore-know things which it is impoſſible for any underſtanding to know? For why ſhould we pretend to know the utmoſt of what infinite power can do, any more than the utmoſt of what infinite underſtanding can know?

Anſw. I know no reaſon but that the argument ſhould be granted, if there were an equal neceſſity of granting the poſſibility of thoſe things which ſeem to us impoſſible to be done, that there is of granting the poſſibility of fore-knowing future contingencies, though they ſeem to us impoſſible to be known. We muſt grant the poſſibility of fore-knowing future contingencies, becauſe the ſcripture, which we believe to be a divine revelation, expreſly tells us, That God doth fore-know them, and gives us inſtances of it in ſeveral prophecies and predictions. Now if any man can ſhew me as expreſs texts, which ſay, that God can make a body to be in two places at once, I would believe it, though I do not ſee how it is poſſible; becauſe it is reaſonable I ſhould believe that infinite power can do many things, the poſſibility of which my finite underſtanding cannot reach. Now whereas the Papiſts ſay, The ſcripture hath ſaid, that from which this neceſſarily follows, *viz. This is my body:* this is not enough, unleſs they could either prove, that it is neceſſary to underſtand all texts of ſcripture in a rigorous and ſtrict propriety of the letter, without admitting of any trope or figure in the words; which they do not pretend; or elſe ſhew a clear reaſon why this ſhould be underſtood ſo, more than a thouſand others; which they have not done, and I think never can do.

But if it be farther argued; If we grant in one caſe, that thoſe things which ſeem to be contradictions to us, may be poſſible, why not in all caſes? Unleſs we had ſome certain way of diſtinguiſhing between ſeeming contradictions and real ones. And if we grant all contradictions poſſible, then there is no reaſon to exempt theſe from the extent of the divine power; but we may ſafely ſay, that the divine power can make a thing to be, and not to be at the ſame time. To this I anſwer,

1. I do not grant, That any thing which ſeems to me to be a contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be poſſible, unleſs I have higher aſſurance, and greater reaſon to believe it to be poſſible, than I have to believe it to be a contradiction: For example, ſuppoſe it were clearly revealed in ſcripture, that two bodies may be in the ſame place, and at the ſame time (which is not, nor any think like it); then having a revelation for this, and no revelation that it is not a contradiction, I have higher aſſurance, and greater reaſon to believe it poſſible, than that it is a contradiction; and conſequently I have reaſon to believe it is no contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the ſame thing may be, and not be at the ſame time: But though in caſe of divine revelation, I may believe that to be no contradiction, which ſeems to me to be a contradiction; yet I am not without great neceſſity and clear evidence, to offer violence to reaſon, and affront the faculty of underſtanding, which God hath endowed me withal, by entertaining any thing which ſeems to me to be a contradiction; which the Papiſts do in the buſineſs of *tranſubſtantiation*, without any evidence of revelation, and conſequently without neceſſity.

2. But if *this* were revealed in ſcripture, that the ſame thing may be, and not be at the ſame time, I could have no reaſon to believe that, becauſe I could have no aſſurance, if that were true, that the ſcriptures were a divine revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were; for if it were true, that the ſame thing may be and not be, then a divine revelation may be no divine revelation; and when I am bound to believe a thing, I may be bound at the ſame time not to believe it, and ſo all things would fall into uncertainty, and the foundation of all aſſurance, and of all duty and obedience, both of faith and practice, would be taken away.

The 2d Objection is from the power of creation, which is generally acknowledged to be a making of ſomething out of nothing. Now ſay the objectors, this ſeems as palpable a contradiction as any thing elſe.

Anſw. To us indeed, who converſe with material things, and never ſaw any thing made but out of præ-exiſtent matter, it is very hard to conceive how any thing ſhould be created, that is, produced out of nothing: but every thing that is ſtrange, is not a contradiction. It is ſtrange to us, and hard to conceive, that there ſhould be ſuch a thing as a ſpirit, who never ſaw, nor can ſee any thing but matter; and yet we grant there are ſpirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any thing ſhould be made but out of matter; and yet ſpirit, if it were made of any thing præ-exiſtent, cannot be made of matter: But if we will attend to thoſe common dictates of reaſon, which every man, whether he will or no, muſt aſſent to, we may eaſily underſtand creation to be poſſible, and free from contradiction. For the clearing of this, I will proceed by theſe ſteps:

1. The true notion of creation, is the bringing of ſomething into being, which before had no being at all; for the phraſe of making ſomething out of nothing, or out of no præ-exiſtent matter, does miſlead our underſtandings into odd conceits, as if nothing could be the material cauſe of ſomething, or as if nothing could be what is material.

2. Every one muſt grant, that ſomething is; for we ſee that things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one muſt grant, that ſomething is of it ſelf, whether *matter*, or *that being* which we call *God*.

4. Every one muſt grant, that that which was of it ſelf, was always; for nothing can begin of it ſelf.

5. It is much more eaſy to conceive how a thing, that once was not, might ſometime be brought into being by another, than how a thing ſhould be always of it ſelf; for that which once was not, is ſuppoſed to have ſomething before it, *by which* it might be made, though not *out of which it was made*; but that which was always, neither had, nor could have any thing, *by which* or *out of which* it could be made. And why cannot a thing come into being, when there was nothing before it, out of which it was made, as well as a thing be always, when there could not be any thing before it, out of which it ſhould be?

Secondly, I exempt thoſe things from the extent of omnipotence, which imply imperfection, which are contrary to the nature and perfection of God, both natural and moral imperfections; for theſe alſo deſtroy power, becauſe they are not arguments of power, but of impotence. Natural imperfections; as to die, to be ſick, to be in want, to eat, to ſleep, to forget, *&c.* Moral imperfections, thoſe which contradict the holineſs of God, as ſin and vice, or to compel any to ſin; which contradict his goodneſs, as to be cruel; which contradict his truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his promiſe, to deny himſelf; *Tit.* i. 2. 2 *Tim.* ii. 13. *Jam.* i. 12. He is ſaid to be ἀπείραστος κακῶν, contrary to the conſtancy and immutability of his nature, as to change his decree, to repent; contrary to juſtice and equity, as for ever to ſpare and to pardon obſtinate ſinners, eternally to puniſh innocent and good men; for theſe are moral imperfections, and contradict the holineſs, and truth, and goodneſs, and juſtice, and immutability of the divine nature; and that diſtinction between God's *abſolute* and *ordinate* power, that is, that God hath an *abſolute* power of doing ſome things, which yet, upon *ſuppoſition* of his decree, or promiſe, or goodneſs, or juſtice, he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unleſs men mean by it only this, that ſome things which argue an Imperfection, do not imply a contradiction, which is moſt true; but both theſe are abſolutely and equally impoſſible to God. I proceed to the

Second thing I propoſed, That this perfection belongs to God; and this I ſhall ſhew,

I. From the dictates of natural light.

II. From the ſcripture, or divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural light. This was one of the moſt uſual titles which the heathens gave to their ſupreme deity, *Optimus Maximus*; next to his goodneſs they placed his greatneſs, which does chiefly appear in his power; and they did not only attribute a great power to him, but an *omnipotence*. *Nihil eſt quod Deus efficere, non poteſt*, ſaith *Tully de Div.* Now their natural reaſon did convince them, that this perfection did belong to God by theſe *three* arguments:

1. From thoſe two great inſtances and expreſſions of his power, *creation* and *providence*; for the heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the world, and the preſervation and government of it, to be the effects of power, determined by goodneſs, and regulated by wiſdom. Hence they gave thoſe titles to God of *Opifex Rerum*, and *Rector Mundi*. I ſay generally, I except *Ariſtotle*, who ſuppoſed the world not to have been made, but to have been from eternity; and *Epicurus* with his followers, who aſcribed the regular and orderly frame of nature to a happy caſualty and fortunate concourſe of atoms: But generally the wiſer did look upon the vaſt frame of nature, this ſtately fabrick of the world, and

the upholding and preſerving of it, as an argument of a divine and inviſible power. And ſo the Apoſtle tells us, *Rom.* i. 20. that by the light of nature, *the inviſible things of God were clearly ſeen by the things that were made, even his eternal power and godhead.*

2. Becauſe all other perfections, without this, would be inſignificant and ineffectual, or elſe could not be at all. Without this, goodneſs would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demonſtration of it ſelf; knowledge would be an idle ſpeculation; and wiſdom to contrive things, without power to effect them, would be an uſeleſs thing. There would be no ſuch things as juſtice, if the divine nature were without a power to reward and puniſh; no ſuch thing as faithfulneſs, if he had not a power to perform what he promiſes; no providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no power, to take upon him to govern and to intermeddle in the affairs of the world.

3. Without this there could be no religion. Take away the power of God, and there can be no foundation of faith and truſt, no reaſon for fear; all arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm from an impotent being that could do nothing. The ſanction of God's laws would be taken away. To give authority to laws, there muſt not only be a right to command, but power to back thoſe commands; the grand ſecurity and laſt reſort of all government and authority is power. *James* iv. 12. *There is one law-giver, who is able to ſave, and to deſtroy. None can be a law-giver* but he that hath this power, to reward and puniſh, to make men happy or miſerable, *to ſave, or to deſtroy.* Men would not pray to God, nor make any addreſs to him, if they did not believe he were able to ſupply their wants, and relieve them in their ſtraits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales conſenſiſſent alloquendi ſurda numina & inefficaces deos*, Sen. There would be no encouragement for men to ſerve God, if they did not believe that he were able to reward them, and bring them to happineſs, and to defend them againſt all the enemies of their welfare, ſo that it ſhould not be in the power of the moſt malicious ſpirits to hinder them of their happineſs.

II. From ſcripture, or divine revelation. In producing texts to this purpoſe, I will proceed by theſe ſteps:

1. Take notice of thoſe which in general aſcribe power, and might, and ſtrength to God. *Pſal.* xxiv. 8. *The Lord, ſtrong and mighty. So girt with power; the mighty God; thine is the greatneſs and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.* Of the ſame nature are thoſe places which call upon all creatures to aſcribe this to God; *Give unto the Lord, ye mighty; give unto the Lord glory and ſtrength.*

2. Thoſe which abſcribe this to God in an eminent degree. *Job* ix. 4. *He is mighty in ſtrength; excellent in power; who is like unto him? The Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

3. Thoſe texts which aſcribe ſuch a power as tranſcends any human or created power. Such as thoſe which expreſs all the power which men have to be derived from God. *John* xix. 11. *Thou couldeſt have no power at all, except it were given thee from above.* And thoſe which advance the power of God above the power of men. *Luke* xviii. 27. *The things which are impoſſible with men, are poſſible with God: He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can aſk or think.* Eph. iii. 20. 2 Chron. xx. 6. Job ix. 4. *According to his mighty power, whereby he is able to ſubdue all things to himſelf.* Phil. iii. 21. Dan. iv. 35. Thoſe which declare all things to be equally eaſy to them, and nothing difficult: *There is nothing too hard for thee.* Jer. xxxii. 17. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

4. Thoſe which aſcribe all power to him, by the titles of *Almighty*, *All-ſufficient.* Gen. xvii. 1. Rev. iv. 8, 11.——xv. 3.——xvi. 7.——xix. 16. Job xlii. 2. *Thou canſt do all things.* Matth. xix. 6. Mark x. 27. Luke i. 37.

I have diſpatched what I propoſed upon this argument; give me leave to apply all in the following particulars.

Uſe; *Firſt*, The conſideration of God's omnipotence may cauſe terror to wicked men. All this power which I have deſcribed, or rather, which is ſo great that I cannot deſcribe it, is engaged againſt ſinners; *His power and his wrath is againſt* *all that forſake him*, Ezra viii. 22. And who knows what thoſe words ſignify, *Pſal.* xc. 11. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? As is thy fear, ſo is thy wrath.* There is no paſſion in the heart of man more infinite than our fear, it troubles us with jealouſy and ſuſpicion of the utmoſt that may happen; but when we have extended our fears to the utmoſt, the power of God's wrath reacheth farther. Whenever we ſin, we challenge the Almighty, and dare infinite power to do its worſt to us. *Job* xv. 25. ſpeaking of the wicked man, *He ſtretcheth out his hand againſt God, and ſtrengtheneth himſelf againſt the Almighty.* Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extreamly happy or miſerable for ever? *Will ye provoke the Lord to jealouſy? are ye ſtronger than he?* Becauſe he doth nothing againſt thee for the preſent, thinkeſt thou he can do nothing? *Nah.* i. 3. *He is ſlow to anger, and great in power, and will not acquit the wicked.* There is a day coming, when *the Son of man ſhall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.*

Secondly, The conſideration of God's omnipotence ſhould check the pride and vain confidence of men. What have we to be proud of? *What have we that we have not received? Where then is cauſe of boaſting? Who may glory in his ſight?* Thoſe that have the greateſt power, ſhould remember whence it is derived, and render back the glory of it to the fountain of it. *Pſal.* xxix. 1. *Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and ſtrength.* So likewiſe it ſhould take men off from relying upon their own ſtrength, which at the beſt is but *an arm of fleſh*, as the ſcripture calls it, for the weakneſs of it. Do we not ſee, that many times *the battle is not to the ſtrong?* That things are not done *by might and by power, but by the ſpirit of the Lord.* When he appears againſt the moſt potent, *their hearts melt within them, and there is no more ſpirit left in them*, as it is ſaid of the mighty inhabitants of *Canaan*, Joſh. v. 1.

Thirdly, We ſhould make this omnipotence of God the object of our truſt and confidence. This is the moſt proper uſe we can make of this doctrine, as *David* does in this *Pſalm*; and this was uſed for a form of bleſſing the people in the name of God; *Pſal.* cxxxiv. 3. *The Lord that made heaven and earth, bleſs thee.* And *David*, when he magnifies God's deliverance of his people from the multitude of their enemies, reſolves it into this, *our help ſtandeth in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.* Thus did the great pattern and example of faith encourage and ſupport his confidence in God in a very difficult trial; he ſtaggered not at it, becauſe *he believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth thoſe things that be not, as though they were: therefore againſt hope he believed in hope*, &c. *Rom.* iv. 17, *&c.* This gives life to all our devotion, to be perſuaded that *God is able to do for us exceedingly above what we can aſk or think*, and that *his is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.*

I ſhall only caution two things, as to our reliance on the power of God.

I. Labour to be ſuch perſons, to whom God hath promiſed that he will engage and employ his omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good from the *Almighty*, we muſt *walk before him, and be perfect*, as he ſaid to *Abraham*. Good men have a peculiar intereſt in God's power; hence he is called *the ſtrength of* Iſrael, and *the mighty one of* Iſrael. If we do what God requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his power, and exert his arm for us; but if we diſobey, we muſt expect he will manifeſt his power againſt us, *Ez.* viii. 22. When we *do well*, we may *commit the keeping of our ſouls to him*, 1 Pet. iv. 19.

II. Our expectations from the omnipotence of God muſt be with ſubmiſſion to his pleaſure and goodneſs, and wiſdom; we muſt not expect that God will manifeſt his power when we think there is occaſion for it; but when it ſeems beſt to him, he will ſo employ his omnipotence, as to manifeſt his goodneſs and wiſdom.

And with theſe two cautions, we may rely upon him in all our wants, both ſpiritual and temporal; for his divine power can *give us all things that pertain to life and goodneſs*, 2 Pet. i. 3. We may truſt him at all times, for the omnipotent God *neither ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth*; *the Almighty fainteth not, neither is he weary. Truſt ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

SERMON C.

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature.

JOHN IV. 24.

God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.

THESE are the words of our Saviour to the woman of *Samaria*, who was ſpeaking to him of the difference between the *Samaritans* and the *Jews*, concerning religion; *Verſe* 20. *Our fathers worſhipped in this mountain; but ye ſay, that in Jeruſalem is the place where men ought to worſhip.* Chriſt tells her, *The time was coming, when the worſhippers of God ſhould neither be* confined *to that mountain, nor to Jeruſalem; but men ſhould worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth*; when this carnal, and ceremonial, and typical worſhip of God ſhould be exalted into a more ſpiritual, a more real, and true, and ſubſtantial religion, which ſhould not be confined to one temple, but ſhould be univerſally diffuſed through the world. Now ſuch a worſhip as this is moſt agreeable to the nature of God; *for he is a ſpirit, and thoſe who worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.* In the words we have,

Firſt, A propoſition laid down, *God is a ſpirit.*

Secondly, A corollary, or inference, deduced from it, *they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.* I ſhall ſpeak of the propoſition, as that which concerns my preſent deſign; and afterwards ſpeak ſomething to the corollary, or inference, deduced from it, together with ſome other inferences drawn from this truth, by way of application.

Firſt, that God is a ſpirit. This expreſſion is ſingular, and not to be paralleled again in the ſcripture; indeed we have often mention made in the ſcripture of *the ſpirit of God*, and *the ſpirit of the Lord*, which ſignifies a divine power and energy; and of *the holy ſpirit*, ſignifying the third perſon in the *Trinity*; God is called *the God of the ſpirits of all fleſh*, Num. xvi. 22. xxvii. 16. much in the ſame ſenſe, as he is called *the father of ſpirits*, Heb. xii. 9. that is, the creator of the ſouls of men; but we no where meet with this expreſſion, or any other equivalent to it, that *God is a ſpirit*, but only in this place; nor had it been uſed here, but to prove, that the beſt worſhip of God, that which is moſt proper to him, is *ſpiritual:* So that the thing which our Saviour here intends, is not to prove the ſpiritual nature of God, but that his worſhip ought to be ſpiritual; nor indeed is there any neceſſity that it ſhould have been any where ſaid in ſcripture, that *God is a ſpirit*, it being the natural notion of a God; no more than it is neceſſary that it ſhould be told us, that God is good, or that he is infinite, and eternal, and the like; or that the ſcripture ſhould prove to us the being of a God. All theſe are manifeſt by the light of nature; and if the ſcripture mentions them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is uſually in order to ſome farther purpoſe.

For we are to know, that the ſcripture ſuppoſeth us to be men, and to partake of the common notions of human nature, and therefore doth not teach us philoſophy, nor ſollicitouſly inſtruct us in thoſe things which are born with us; but ſuppoſeth the knowledge of theſe, and makes uſe of theſe common principles and notions which are in us concerning God, and the immortality of our ſouls, and the life to come, to excite us to our duty, and quicken our endeavours after happineſs. For I do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul is any where expreſſly delivery in ſcripture, but taken for granted; in like manner, that the ſcripture doth not ſollicitouſly inſtruct us in the natural notions which we have of God, but ſuppoſeth them known to us; and if it mention them, it is not ſo much in order to knowledge as to practice; and therefore we need not wonder that this expreſſion, which doth ſet forth to us the nature of God, is but once uſed in ſcripture, and that brought in upon occaſion, and for another purpoſe, becauſe it is a thing naturally known. *Plato* ſays, that God is ἀσώματος, *without body.* In like manner *Tully*, *Nec enim Deus ipſe qui intelligitur à nobis alio modo intelligi poteſt, niſi mens quædam ſoluta & libera; ſegregata ab omni concretione mortali; We cannot conceive of God, but as of a pure mind, entirely free from all mortal compoſition or mixture.* And *Plutarch* after him, νοῦς ὢν ὁ θεὸς, χωριστὸν εἶδος τουτέστι τὸ ἀμιγὲς πάσης ὕλης, μεδενὶ παθετῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, *God is a mind, an abſtract being, pure from all matter, and diſentangled from whatever is poſſible or capable of ſuffering.*

So that natural light informing us that *God is a ſpirit*, there was no need why the ſcripture ſhould inculcate this: it is an excellent medium or argument to prove that the worſhip of God ſhould chiefly be ſpiritual; and although it was not neceſſary that it ſhould have been mentioned for it ſelf, that is, to inform us of a thing which we could not otherwiſe know, yet the wiſdom of God, by the expreſs mention of this, ſeems to have provided againſt an error, which ſome weaker and groſſer ſpirits might be ſubject to. You know God is pleaſed, by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation of himſelf to our capacity, to repreſent himſelf to us in ſcripture by human imperfections; and gives ſuch deſcriptions of himſelf, as if he had a body, and bodily members. Now to prevent any error or miſtake that might be occaſioned hereby, it ſeems very becoming the wiſdom of God, ſome where in ſcripture expreſly to declare the ſpiritual nature of God, that none through weakneſs or wilfulneſs might entertain groſs apprehenſions of him. In ſpeaking to this propoſition, I ſhall,

I. Explain what is meant by *a ſpirit*.

II. Endeavour to prove to you, that *God is a ſpirit*.

III. Anſwer an objection or two.

IV. Draw ſome inferences or corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the notion of *a ſpirit*; I ſhall not trouble you with the ſtrict philoſophical notion of it, as that it is ſuch a ſubſtance as is penetrable, that is, may be in the ſame place with a body, and neither keep out the body, nor be kept out by it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided, that is, really ſeparated and torn from one another, as the parts of a body; but I will give you a negative deſcription of it. A *ſpirit* is not *matter*, it doth not fall under any of our ſenſes, it is that which we cannot ſee nor touch; it is not a body, not fleſh, and blood, and bones; for ſo we find *ſpirit* in ſcripture oppoſed to *fleſh* and *body*; Iſa. xxxi. 3. *There horſes are fleſh, and not ſpirit.* So *Luke* xxiv. when Chriſt appeared to his diſciples after his reſurrection, they were terrified, and *ſuppoſed it had been a ſpirit*, ver. 39. But he ſaid, *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I my ſelf; handle me, and ſee, for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me have.* The moſt uſual deſcription of *a ſpirit* is by theſe negatives, it is not a body, hath not fleſh and bones, doth not conſiſt of matter, or of any thing that falls under our ſenſes, that we can ſee or touch.

II. For the proof of this propoſition, that *God is a ſpirit.* This is not to be proved by way of *demonſtration*; for there is nothing before God, or which can be a cauſe of him, but by way of *conviction*, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary. The firſt and moſt natural notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being every way perfect; and from this notion we muſt argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our reaſonings concerning God by this; ſo that when any thing is ſaid of God, the beſt way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to enquire whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, it belongs to him; if it be not, it is to be removed from him; and if any man aſk, why I ſay God is ſo, or ſo, *a ſpirit*, or *good*, or *juſt?* the beſt reaſon that can be given, is becauſe theſe are perfections, and the contrary to theſe are imperfections. So that if I ſhew, that it would be an imperfection for God to be imagined to be a *body*, or *matter*, I prove that he is *a ſpirit*, becauſe it is an imperfection, that is, an abſurdity to imagine him any thing elſe: To imagine God to be a *body*, or *matter*, doth evidently contradict four great perfections of God.

1. His infiniteneſs, or the immenſity of his being. Grant me but theſe two things, that there is ſomething in the world beſides God, ſome other matter, as the heavens, the air, the earth, and all thoſe things which we ſee; and grant me that two bodies cannot be in the ſame place at once, and then it will evidently follow, that where-ever theſe are, God is ſhut out; and conſequently God ſhould not be infinite, nor in all places; and ſo much as there is of another matter in the world beſides God, ſo many breaches there would be in the divine nature, ſo many *Hiatus's*.

2. The knowledge and wiſdom of God. It cannot be imagined how mere matter can underſtand, how it can diſtinctly comprehend ſuch variety of objects, and at one view take in paſt, preſent, and to come. *Tully*, ſpeaking of ſpirits, ſaith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri poteſt*; *Their original cannot be found upon earth*; *for*, ſaith he, *there is no material or bodily thing*, *Quod vim memoriæ*, *mentis*, *cogitationis habeat*, *quod & præterita teneat*, *& futura provideat*, *& complecti poſſit præſentia*; *quæ ſola divina ſunt*; *Which hath the power of memory*, *of underſtanding*, *of thought*; *which can retain things paſt*, *foreſee things future*, *and comprehend things preſent*; *all which powers are purely divine.*

3. Freedom and Liberty. For the laws of matter are neceſſary, nor can we imagine any αὐτεξούσιον, any *arbitrary principle* in it. This puzzled the *Epicureans*, as we ſee in *Lucretius*; *for if* (ſays he) *all things move by certain and neceſſary laws*, *and there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto each other*, *ſo that if you move this*, *that muſt neceſſarily be moved*; *Whence*, ſaith he, *is liberty? Unde eſt hæc inquam fatis avulſa voluntas*; *Whence is this principle of will*, *whoſe motions are not under any law of neceſſity?*

4. Goodneſs. This follows from the former; for he is not good who does not know what he does, nor does it freely; ſo that take away underſtanding and liberty, and you take away goodneſs: now take away from God infiniteneſs, and knowledge, and liberty, and goodneſs, and you diveſt him of his glory; you take away his moſt eſſential perfections. So that theſe great abſurdities following from the ſuppoſing of God to be meer *matter* or *body*, we are to conceive of him as another kind of ſubſtance, that is, a ſpirit. So that I wonder that the author of the *Leviathan*, who doth more than once expreſly affirm, that there can be nothing in the world but what is material and corporeal, did not ſee that the neceſſary conſequence of this poſition, is to baniſh God out of the world. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt he did ſee it, and was content with the conſequence, and willing the world ſhould entertain it: For it is ſo evident, that by ſuppoſing the divine eſſence to conſiſt of matter, the immenſity of the divine nature is taken away; and it is alſo ſo utterly unimaginable how meer matter ſhould underſtand, and be endowed with liberty, and conſequently with goodneſs, that I cannot but vehemently ſuſpect the man who denies God to be *a ſpirit*, either to have a groſs and faulty underſtanding, or a very ill will againſt God, and an evil deſign to root out of the minds of men the belief of a God. I come in the

III. Place, to conſider the objections.

1. *Obj.* Why then is God repreſented to us ſo often in ſcripture by the parts and members of mens bodies? *Anſw.* I ſhall only ſay at preſent, that all theſe deſcriptions and repreſentations of God, are plainly made to comply with our weakneſs, by way of condeſcenſion and accommodation to our capacities.

2. *Obj.* How is it ſaid, that *man was made after the image of God*, if God be *a ſpirit*, of which there can be no likeneſs nor reſemblance? *Anſw.* Man is not ſaid to be *made after the image of God*, in reſpect of the outward ſhape and features of his body, but in reſpect of the qualities of his mind, as holineſs and righteouſneſs; or of his faculties, as underſtanding and will; or, which the text ſeems moſt to favour, in reſpect of his dominion and ſovereignty over the creatures; for in the two former reſpects, the angels are made after the image of God. Now this ſeems to be ſpoken peculiarly of men, *Gen.* i. 24. *Let us make man in our own image*, *after our own likeneſs*, *and let them have dominion over the fiſh of the ſea*, *and the fowls of the air*, &c.

IV. I come now to draw ſome inferences or corollaries from hence, and they ſhall be partly *ſpeculative*, partly *practical*.

Firſt, *Speculative* inferences.

1. That God is inviſible. The proper object of ſight is colour, and that ariſeth from the various diſpoſitions of the parts of matter which cauſe ſeveral reflections of light. Now a ſpirit hath no parts nor matter, and therefore is inviſible. 1 Tim. i. 17. *Unto the eternal, immortal, inviſible, the only wiſe God.* Heb. xi. 27. *He endured, as ſeeing him who is inviſible*; as *ſeeing him* by an eye *of faith*, who is *inviſible* by an eye of *ſenſe*. 1 Tim. vi. 16. *Whom no man hath ſeen, nor can ſee.*

When *Moſes* and the elders of *Iſrael* are ſaid to have *ſeen God*, and *Jacob* to have *ſeen him face to face*, Exod. ii. 6. Gen. xxxii. 30. it is meant of an angel covered with divine glory and majeſty; as we ſhall ſee if we compare theſe with other texts. When *Moſes* is ſaid to have *ſpoken to him face to face*, that is familiarly; and ſo *Micaiah*, 1 Kings xxii. 19. is ſaid to have *ſeen God upon his throne, and all Iſrael ſcattered up and down*; this was in a viſion. And it is promiſed, that in heaven we ſhall *ſee God*, that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him, and full enjoyment; as to *ſee good days*, is to enjoy them. Thoſe texts, where it is ſaid, *No man can ſee God and live*, Exod. xxxiii. 20. and John i. 18. *No man hath ſeen God at any time*, do not intimate that God is viſible, though we cannot ſee him; but *ſeeing* is metaphorically uſed for *knowing*, and the meaning is, that in this life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of God. A clear diſcovery of God to our underſtanding would let in joys into our ſouls, and create deſires in us too great for frail mortality to bear.

2. That he is *the living God*; ſpirit and liſe are often put together in ſcripture.

3. That God is immortal. This the ſcripture attributes to him, 1 *Tim.* i. 17. *To the king immortal, inviſible.* 1 Tim. vi. 16. *Who only hath immortality.* This alſo flows from God's ſpirituality; a ſpiritual nature hath no principles of corruption in it, nothing that is liable to periſh, or decay, or die. Now this doth ſo eminently agree to God, either becauſe he is purely ſpiritual and immaterial, as poſſibly no creature is; or elſe becauſe he is not only immortal in his own nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, becauſe he hath an original and independant immortality; and therefore the Apoſtle doth attribute it to him in ſuch a ſingular and peculiar manner, *who only hath immortality*.

Secondly, *Practical* inferences.

1. We are not to conceive of God as having a body, or any corporeal ſhape or members. This was the groſs conceit of the *Anthropomorphites* of old, and of ſome *Socinians* of late, which they ground upon the groſs and literal interpretation of many figurative ſpeeches in ſcripture concerning God, as where it ſpeaks of his face, and hand, and arm, *&c.* But we are very unthankful to God, who condeſcends to repreſent himſelf to us according to our capacities, if we abuſe this condeſcenſion to the blemiſh and reproach of the divine nature. If God be pleaſed to ſtoop to our weakneſs, we muſt not therefore level him to our infirmities.

2. If God be *a ſpirit*, we are not to worſhip God by any image or ſenſible repreſentation. Becauſe *God is a ſpirit*, we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to repreſent him by *the likeneſs of any thing that is in any heaven above*, that is, of any birds; *or in the earth beneath*, that is, of any beaſt; *or in the waters under the earth*, that is, of any fiſh; as it is in the *ſecond commandment*. For, as the Prophet tells us, there is nothing that we can liken God to; *Iſa.* xl. 18. *To whom will ye liken God? or what likeneſs will ye compare to him?* We debaſe his ſpiritual and incorruptible nature, when we compare him to corruptible creatures. *Rom.* i. 22, 23. ſpeaking of the heathen idolatry, *Who profeſſing themſelves wiſe, became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beaſts, and creeping things. They became fools*; this is the folly of idolatry, to liken a ſpirit, which hath no bodily ſhape, to things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that however ſome are pleaſed to mince the matter, I cannot ſee how the church of *Rome*, which worſhips God by, or towards ſome image or ſenſible repreſentation, can be excuſed from *idolatry*; and the church of *England* doth not without very juſt cauſe challenge the *Romiſh* church with it, and make it a ground of ſeparation from her.

3. If *God be a ſpirit*, then we ſhould *worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.* This is the inference of the text, and therefore I ſhall ſpeak a little more largely of it;

only I muſt explain what is meant by *worſhipping in ſpirit and in truth*, and ſhew you the force of this conſequence, how it follows, that becauſe *God is a ſpirit*, therefore he muſt be *worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth*.

1. For the explication of it. This word *ſpirit* is ſometimes applied to the doctrine of the goſpel, and ſo it is oppoſed to *letter*, by which name the doctrine of *Moſes* is called, 2 *Cor.* iii. 6. *Who hath made us able miniſters of the New Teſtament, not of the letter, but of the ſpirit*; not of the law, which was written in tables of ſtone, but which Chriſt by his ſpirit writes in the hearts of believers. Sometimes to the worſhip of the goſpel; and ſo it is oppoſed to the *fleſh*, Gal. iii. 3. *Having begun in the ſpirit, are ye now made perfect by the fleſh?* that is, by the works of the ceremonial law, which is therefore called fleſh, becauſe the principal ceremony of it, *circumciſion*, was made in the *fleſh*, and becauſe their ſacrifices, a chief part of their worſhip, were of the *fleſh* of beaſts; and becauſe the greateſt part of their ordinances, as waſhing, and the like, related to *the body*. Hence it is the Apoſtle calls the worſhip of the *Jews*, *the law of a carnal commandment*, Heb. vii. 16. and *Heb.* ix. 10. *Carnal ordinances*, ſpeaking of the ſervice of the law, *which*, ſaith he, *ſtood in meats, and drinks, and divers waſhings, and carnal ordinances*. Now in oppoſition to this *carnal* and *ceremonial* worſhip, we are to *worſhip God in the ſpirit*. The worſhip of the *Jews* was moſt *a bodily ſervice*; but we are to give God *a reaſonable ſervice*, to ſerve him with the *ſpirit of our minds*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks; inſtead of *offering the fleſh of bulls and goats*, we are to *conſecrate our ſelves* to the ſervice of God: *This is a holy and acceptable ſacrifice*, or *reaſonable ſervice*.

And in truth. Either in oppoſition to the falſe worſhip of the *Samaritans*, (as *in ſpirit* is oppoſed to the worſhip of the *Jews*) as our Saviour tells the woman, that *they worſhipped they knew not what*; or (which I rather think) in oppoſition to *the ſhadows* of the law; and ſo it is oppoſed, *John* i. 17. *The law was given by Moſes, but grace and truth came by Jeſus Chriſt*.

Not that the external ſervice of God is here excluded, not that we are to ſhew no outward reverence to him; but that, as under the law, the ſervice of God was chiefly external and corporeal, ſo now it ſhould chiefly be inward and ſpiritual; the worſhip of God, under the goſpel, ſhould chiefly be ſpiritual and ſubſtantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious devotion.

2*dly*, For the force of the conſequence, it doth not lie in this, that juſt ſuch as God is, ſuch muſt our worſhip of him be; for this would exclude all bodily and outward worſhip; our worſhip of God muſt therefore be inviſible, eternal, *&c.* for ſo is he; and beſides, the *will* of God ſeems rather to be the rule of his worſhip than his *nature*: But the force of it is this; God is of a ſpiritual nature, and this is to be ſuppoſed to be his will, that our worſhip ſhould be as agreeable to the object of it, as the nature of the creature, who is to give it, will bear. Now ſaith Chriſt to the woman, the *Jews* and the *Samaritans* limit their worſhip to a certain place, and it conſiſts chiefly in certain carnal rites and ordinances; but, ſaith he, though God have permitted this for a time, becauſe of the carnality and *hardneſs of their hearts*, yet the time is coming, when a more ſpiritual, and ſolid, and ſubſtantial worſhip of God is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular places and rites; not tied to the temple, or to ſuch external ceremonies, but conſiſting in the devotion of our ſpirits, even the inward frame and temper of our hearts; all outward circumſtances (excepting thoſe of the two ſacraments which are poſitive) being left by the goſpel to as great a liberty, as natural neceſſity and decency will permit.

We muſt worſhip God, and therefore it is naturally neceſſary that we ſhould do it ſomewhere, in ſome place; now ſeeing ſome body muſt determine this, it is moſt convenient that authority ſhould determine it according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We muſt not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally undecent in the worſhip of God; this authority ſhould reſtrain; but farther than this, I doubt not but the goſpel hath left us free; and to this end, that the leſs we are tied to external obſervances, the more intent we ſhould be upon the ſpiritual and ſubſtantial parts of religion, the conforming of our ſelves to the mind and will of God, endeavouring to be like unto God, and to have our ſouls and ſpirits engaged in thoſe Duties we perform to him. So that our Saviour's argument is this; *God is a*

Spirit, that is, the moſt excellent nature and being, and therefore muſt be ſerved with *the beſt*. We conſiſt of body and ſoul, it is true, and we muſt ſerve him with our *whole man*, bur principally with our *ſouls*, which are the moſt excellent part of our ſelves; the ſervice of our mind and ſpirit is the beſt we can perform, and therefore moſt agreeable to God, who is a ſpirit, and the beſt and moſt perfect being.

So that the inference is this, that if *God be a ſpirit, we muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth*; our religion muſt be real, and inward, and ſincere, and ſubſtantial: we muſt not think to put off God with external obſervances, and with bodily reverenee and attendance; this we muſt give him, but we muſt *principally* regard that our ſervice of him be reaſonable, that is directed by our underſtandings, and accompanied with our affections. Our religion muſt conſiſt principally in a ſincere love and affection to God, which expreſſeth it ſelf in a real conformity of our lives and actions to his will; and when we make our ſolemn approaches to him, in the duties of his worſhip and ſervice, we muſt perform all acts of outward worſhip to God with a pure and ſincere mind; whatever we do in the ſervice of God, we muſt *do it heartily as to the Lord*. God is a pure ſpirit, preſent to our ſpirits, intimate to our ſouls, and conſcious to the moſt ſecret and retired motions of our hearts: now becauſe we ſerve the ſearcher of hearts, we muſt ſerve him with our hearts.

Indeed if we did worſhip God only to be ſeen of men, a pompous and external worſhip would be very ſuitable to ſuch an end; but religion is not intended to pleaſe men, but God; and therefore it muſt be ſpiritual, and inward, and real.

And where-ever the external part of religion is principally regarded, and men are more careful to worſhip God with outward pomp and ceremony, than in *ſpirit and in truth*, religion degenerates into ſuperſtition, and men embrace the ſhadow of religion, and let go the ſubſtance. And this the church of *Rome* hath done almoſt to the utter ruin of chriſtianity: She hath clogged religion and the worſhip of God, with ſo many rites and ceremonies, under one pretence or ather, that the *yoke* of *Chriſt* is become *heavier* than *that of Moſes*; and they have made *the goſpel* a more *carnal* commandment than the *law*; and whatever chriſtians or churches are intent upon external rites and obſervances, to the neglect of the weightier parts of religion, regarding *meats and drinks*, &c. to the prejudice of *righteouſneſs and peace*, wherein *the kingdom of God* conſiſts, they advance a religion as contrary to the nature of God, and as unſuitable to the genius and temper of the goſpel, as can be imagined.

It is an obſervation of Sir *Edwin Sands*, that as children are pleaſed with toys, ſo, ſaith he, it is a pitiful and childiſh ſpirit that is predominant in the contrivers and zealots of a ceremonious religion. I deny not, but that very honeſt and devout men may be this way addicted; but the wiſer any man is, the better he underſtands the nature of God and of religion, the farther he will be from this temper.

A religion that conſiſts in external and little things, doth moſt eaſily gain upon and poſſeſs the weakeſt minds; and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their ſpirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent duties of chriſtianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity; and if we let out much of it upon ſmall things, there will be too little left for thoſe parts of religion which are of greateſt moment and concernment: if our heat evaporate in externals, the heart and vitals of religion will inſenſibly cool and decline.

How ſhould we bluſh, who are *chriſtians*, that we have not learnt this eaſy truth from the goſpel, which even the light of nature taught the heathen? *Cultus autem deorum eſt optimus itemque ſanctiſſimus atque caſtiſſimus, pleniſſimuſque pietatis, ut eos ſemper pura integra & incorrupti mente & voce veneremur.* Tully. *The beſt, the ſureſt, the moſt chaſte, and moſt devout worſhip of the gods, is that which is paid them with a pure, ſincere, and uncorrupt mind, and words truly repreſenting the thoughts of the heart. Compoſitum jus faſque animi, &c. Serve God with a pure, honeſt, holy frame of ſpirit; bring him a heart that is but generouſly honeſt, and he will accept of the plaineſt ſacrifice.*

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious worſhip of the *Jews* was never a thing in it ſelf acceptable to God, or which he did delight in; and though God was pleaſed with their obedience to the ceremonial law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not deſire it; but that which our Saviour ſaith concerning the law of divorce, is true likewiſe of the ceremonial, that it was permitted to the *Jews for the hdrdneſs of their hearts*, and for their proneneſs to idolatry. God did not command it ſo much by way of approbation, as by way of condeſcenſion to their weakneſs; it was becauſe of the *the hardneſs of their carnal hearts*, that God brought them under *the law of a carnal commandment*, as the Apoſtle calls it. See *Pſal.* li. 16, 17. *Jer.* vii. 21.

The reaſon why I have inſiſted ſo long upon this, is, to let you underſtand what is the true nature of Chriſt's religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which men are apt to have for external and indifferent things in religion. The ſacrifices and rites of the *Jews*, were very unagreeable and unſuitable to the nature of God. *Pſal.* l. 13. *Will I eat the fleſh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* Spirits neither eat nor drink; it was a very unſuitable way of ſervice to kill oxen and ſheep for God; and there is the ſame reaſon of all other rites, which either natural neceſſity or decency doth not require. Can any man in earneſt think, that God, who is a ſpirit, is pleaſed with the pompous bravery and pageantry which affects our ſenſes? So little doth God value indifferent rites, that even the neceſſary external ſervice of God, and outward reverence, where they are ſeparated from *ſpirit and truth*, from real holineſs and obedience to the indiſpenſable laws of Chriſt, are ſo far from being acceptable to God, that they are abominable; nay, if they be uſed for a cloak of ſin, or in oppoſition to real religion, and with a deſign to undermine it, God accounts ſuch ſervice in the number of the moſt heinous ſins.

You, who ſpend the ſtrength and vigour of your ſpirits about external things, whoſe *zeal for* or *againſt* ceremonies is ready *to eat you up*; you who hate and perſecute one another becauſe of theſe things, and break the neceſſary and indiſpenſable commands of love, as an indifferent and unneceſſary ceremony, *go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice*, which our Saviour doth ſo often inculcate, and that *Rom.* xiv. 17. *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink*, &c. And ſtudy the meaning of this, *God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.*

SERMON CI.

The Immenſity of the Divine Nature.

PSAL. CXXXIX. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit? or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there? If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me.

THAT attribute of God which I laſt diſcourſed of is moſt abſolute, and declares his eſſence moſt immediately; *the ſpirituality of the divine nature.* I ſhall in the next place ſpeak of thoſe which relate to the manner of his being, *immenſity and eternity*, that is, the *infiniteneſs* of his eſſence, both in reſpect of *ſpace and duration*; that the divine nature hath no limits of its being, nor bounds of its duration. I ſhall at the preſent ſpeak to the *firſt* of theſe, his *immenſity*, and that from theſe words which I here read to you, *Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit*, &c. The meaning of which is this, That God is a ſpirit infinitely diffuſing himſelf, preſent in all places, ſo that wherever I go, God is there; we cannot flee from his preſence. *If I aſcend into heaven he is there; if I go down into the grave*, the place of ſilence and obſcurity, *he is there*; (for that is the meaning of the expreſſion) *if I make my bed in hell; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me*; that is, if my motion ſhould be as ſwift as that of the light, which, when the ſun riſeth, darts it ſelf in an inſtant from one part of the world to another, over the earth and the ſea, the remoteſt parts of the world which are unknown to us, yet would God be preſent to me in the motion, and all along as I go muſt I be led and upholden by him; ſo that all theſe expreſſions do but ſignify to us, the *immenſity* of God's eſſence, that his being is infinitely diffuſed and preſent in all places.

In ſpeaking to this attribute of God's *immenſity*, I ſhall *firſt* explain it to you a little.

Secondly, Prove that it doth belong to him.

Thirdly, Anſwer an objection or two that may be made againſt it.

Fourthly, Draw ſome doctrinal inferences from it.

Fifthly, Make ſome uſe and improvement of it.

Firſt, For the explication of it. By the *immenſity* of God, I mean, that his being hath no bounds or limits, but doth every way ſpread and diffuſe it ſelf beyond what we can imagine; ſo that you cannot define the preſence of God by any certain place; ſo as to ſay, here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, ſo as to ſay, thus far his being reacheth, and no farther; but he is every where preſent after a moſt infinite manner, in the darkeſt corners and moſt private receſſes; the moſt ſecret cloſet that is in the whole world, the heart of man, darkneſs and privacy cannot keep him out; the preſence of another being, even of a body, which is the groſſeſt ſubſtance, doth not exclude him; the whole world doth not confine him; but he fills all the ſpace which we can imagine beyond this viſible world, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Secondly, For the proof of it, I ſhall attempt it,

I. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation.

III. From the inconvenience of the contrary.

I. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds. We find that the heathen, by the light of nature, did attribute this perfection to God. *Tully* tells us, *De Nat. Deor.* That *Pythagoras* thought, *Deum eſſe animam per naturam rerum omnem intentum & comeantem, That God is as it were a ſoul paſſing through and inſpiring all nature.* And in *L.* 2. *de leg.* that this was *Thales* his opinion which he commends, *Homines exiſtimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia eſſe plena. That men ought to believe, that the gods ſee all things, that all things are full of them.* So *Sen. Epiſt.* 95. *Ubique & omnibus præſto eſt. He is every where preſent and at hand,* & de Benef. l. 4. *Quocunque te flexeris ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi, nihil ab illo vacat, opus ſuum ipſe implet. Which way ſoever thou turneſt thy ſelf, thou ſhall find him meeting thee; nothing is without him, he fills his own work.* Not much differing from the expreſſion of the Pſalmiſt here.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation. I ſhall inſtance in ſome remarkable places; 1 Kings viii. 27. *Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.* Job xi. 7, 8, 9. *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* Iſa. lxvi. 1. *Thus ſaith the Lord, behold, heaven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-ſtool: where is the houſe that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my reſt?* Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. *Am I a God at hand, ſaith the Lord, and not a God a far off? Can any hide himſelf in ſecret places that I ſhall not ſee him, ſaith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, ſaith the Lord?* Amos ix. 2, 3. *Though they dig into hell, thence ſhall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: And though they hide themſelves in the top of Carmel, I will ſearch and take them out thence: and though they be hid from my ſight in the bottom of the ſea, thence will I command the ſerpent, and he ſhall bite them.* Acts xvii. 27, 28. *Though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain alſo ſome of your own poets have ſaid, for we are alſo his off-ſpring.*

III. From the inconveniencies of the contrary. And this is the moſt proper way of proving any of God's perfections; for, as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before God, nor any cauſe of his being, his perfections cannot be proved by way of *demonſtration*, but of *conviction*, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary. The firſt and moſt eaſy notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being which hath all perfection, and is free from all imperfections. Now if I prove that the *immenſity* of God's eſſence is a perfection, or, which is the ſame, that the contrary is an imperfection, I do ſufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to ſuppoſe the divine eſſence to be limited, or confined, and his preſence to be any where excluded, doth contradict both this neceſſary perfection of God, his univerſal providence; and the neceſſary duty of creatures, to worſhip and truſt in him; and the voluntary maniſeſtation and appearance of God in the incarnation of Jeſus Chriſt.

1. It contradicts the univerſal providence of God. The univerſal providence of God ſuppoſeth many perfections, *viz.* infinite knowledge, and infinite power, his omniſcience and omnipotence, neither of which can be imagined without omnipreſence. We find that all finite beings have a finite knowledge, and a finite power; and it cannot be conceived how infinite underſtanding and power can be founded any where elſe, than in an infinite eſſence. To have an infinite knowledge of all things, even thoſe things which are moſt ſecret and hidden, to be able to do all things, to ſteer and govern the actions of all creatures, and to have a perfect care of them, ſeems, to all the reaſon of mankind, to require immediate preſence.

2. It contradicts the neceſſary duty of the creature, which is to worſhip God, to depend upon him for every thing, and in every thing to acknowledge him. Now all worſhip of God is rendered vain, or at leaſt uncertain, if God be not preſent to us to hear our prayers, to take notice of our wants, and receive our acknowledgments: It will much abate our confidence in God, and our fear to offend him, if we be uncertain whether he be preſent to us or not, whether he ſees our actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary maniſeſtation and appearance of God in the incarnation of Chriſt. He that ſuppoſeth God not to be every where preſent by his eſſence, muſt in all reaſon confine his preſence to heaven, and ſuppoſe him to be preſent elſewhere only by his virtue and power: But if this were ſo, how could the divinity be eſſentially united to the human nature of Chriſt, which was here upon earth? how *is God with us?* How does *he pitch his tabernacle amongſt men*, if his eſſential preſence be confined to heaven?

Thirdly, I come to anſwer objections againſt this doctrine.

There are *two* objections againſt this.

1. From reaſon.
2. From ſcripture.

1. *Obj.* Reaſon will be ready to ſuggeſt, that this is a diſparagement to the divine nature, to tie his preſence to this vile dunghill of the earth, and ſordid ſink of hell. This is a groſs apprehenſion of God, and a meaſuring of him by our ſelves. Indeed if we look upon God as capable of injury, and ſuffering, and offence from the contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then indeed there were ſome ſtrength in this objection: But he is a bleſſed and pure being; *Mens ſegregata ab omni concretione mortali. A mind free from all mortal compoſition or mixture.* Tully. Μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον, *diſentangled from every thing paſſable*, as *Plut.* Thoſe things that are nauſeous to our ſenſes, do not affect him. Darkneſs is uncomfortable to us; but *the darkneſs and the light are all one to him.* Wickedneſs may *hurt a man, or the ſon of man*; but *if we multiply our tranſgreſſions, we do nothing to God*, as *Elihu ſpeaks*, Job xxxv. 6. Nothing can diſquiet or diſcompoſe his happy and bleſſed nature, but he converſeth here in this dark and troubled world with leſs danger or diſturbance, or any impure contagion, than the ſun-beams.

2. *Obj.* Does not the ſcripture tell us, that *God ſits in the heavens*, and *dwells on high*; *that heaven is his throne*, and that *it is the city of the great God?* Doth not the Lord's-prayer teach us to ſay, *Our Father which art in heaven?* Is he not ſaid to *look down from heaven*, and *to hear in heaven, his dwelling-place?* Is it not ſaid, that *he doth not dwell in temples made with hands?* And does not *Solomon*,

1 *Kings* viii. 27. put it as a ſtrange queſtion, *will God indeed dwell on the earth?* Is he not ſaid to *come down* and *draw near* to us, and to be *afar off from us?* Now how does this agree with his *immenſity* and *omnipreſence?*

For anſwer to this, I muſt diſtinguiſh the preſence of God. There is, *firſt* his *glorious preſence*, that is, ſuch a preſence of God as is accompanied with an extraordinary manifeſtation of his glory, and that is eſpecially and chiefly confined to heaven, in reſpect of which it is called his *ſeat*, and *throne*, and *the habitation of his glory*. Some degree of this was in the temple, which is the reaſon of *Solomon's* admiration, *Will God indeed dwell on earth?*

Secondly, There is his *gracious preſence*, which diſcovers it ſelf by miraculous effects of his favour and goodneſs, and aſſiſtance, and thereby he is ſaid to *dwell in the hearts* of good men, and *with them that are of an humble and contrite ſpirit*, Iſa. lvii. 15. and in reſpect of this, he is ſaid to *draw near to us*, to *look down upon us*; and in reſpect of the abſence of this, to be *far from us*.

Thirdly, There is his *eſſential preſence*, which is equally and alike in all places; and this is not excluded by thoſe former expreſſions, which the ſcripture uſeth to denote to us, the *glorious* and *gracious* preſence of God.

Fourthly, To make ſome inferences. I will mention only ſuch as the ſcripture here takes notice of, ſpeaking of God's *immenſity*.

I. *Inf.* That God is a ſpirit. This neceſſarily flows from his *immenſity*; for if the eſſence of God be every where diffuſed, the divine nature muſt be ſpiritual, otherwiſe it could not be in the ſame place where body and matter is, but muſt be ſhut out of the world. But this I ſpoke more largely to, in my diſcourſe of God's being a *ſpirit*. This the *Pſalmiſt* obſerves here, *Where ſhall I go from thy ſpirit?* If he were not *a ſpirit*, we might *go from him*, and *hide our ſelves from his preſence*.

II. *Inf.* That God is incomprehenſible. That which is infinite cannot be meaſured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this alſo the *Pſalmiſt* takes notice of, in the verſe before my text, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain it.*

III. *Inf.* That God is omniſcient. If God be every where, then he knows all things, yea, even the hidden things of darkneſs, the ſecrets of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from an infinite eye; he is preſent to our thoughts, intimate to our hearts and reins: This the *Pſalmiſt* takes notice of, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12th verſes.

IV. *Inf.* That God is omnipotent. *He can do all things.* Diſtance limits the power of creatures, and makes *their hands ſhort*; but God is every where, nothing is out of his reach; and this alſo the *Pſalmiſt* intimates in the text, *ver.* 10. *Even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me.*

Fifthly, The uſe and improvement I ſhall make of this, ſhall be,

1. To awaken our fear of him.
2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him.

1. To awaken our fear of him. The conſideration of God's preſence ſhould awaken in us a fear of reverence. The preſence of an earthly majeſty will awe our ſpirits, and compoſe us to reverence; yea, the preſence of a wiſe and good man; how much more ſhould the preſence of the great, and glorious, the wiſe, and the holy, and the juſt God, ſtrike awe upon our ſpirits? Wherever we are, God is with us; we always converſe with him, and live continually in his preſence. Now a heathen could ſay, *Cum diis verecundè agendum, We muſt behave our ſelves modeſtly, becauſe we are in the preſence of God.*

And it ſhould awaken in us a fear to offend God, and a fear of the divine diſpleaſure for having offended him. Fear is the moſt wakeful paſſion in the ſoul of man, and is the firſt principle that is wrought upon in us from the apprehenſions of a deity, it flows immediately from the principle of ſelf-preſervation which God hath planted in every man's nature; we have a natural dread and horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our being or happineſs. Now the greateſt danger is from the greateſt power, for where we are clearly over-matched, we cannot hope to make oppoſition nor reſiſtance with ſecurity and ſucceſs, to rebel with ſafety: Now he that apprehends God to be near him, and preſent to him, believes ſuch a being to ſtand by him as is poſſeſs'd of an infinite and irreſiſtible power, and will vindicate all contempt of the divine majeſty, and violation of his laws. If we believe God to be always preſent with us, *fear will continually take hold of us*, and we ſhall ſay of every place, as *Jacob* did of *Bethel*, *ſurely God is in this place, how dreadful is this place!* When we have at any time provoked God, if we believe the juſt God is at hand to revenge himſelf, and if we believe *the power of his anger*, we ſhall ſay with *David*, Pſal. lxxvi. 7. *Thou, even thou, art to be feared, and who may ſtand before thee when thou art angry?* Pſal. cxix. 120. *My fleſh trembleth becauſe of thee, and I am afraid of thy jadgments.*

Sinners, conſider this, *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; and every time you ſin, you are within his reach. Let then the conſideration of God's preſence deter us from ſin, and quicken us to our duty. The eye and preſence of a ſuperior will lay a great reſtaint upon men; the eye of our prince, our maſter, or our father, will make us afraid or aſhamed to do any thing that is fooliſh or unſeemly: And will we do that under the eye of God, which we ſhould bluſh to do before a grave or wiſe perſon, yea, before a child or a fool? Did but men live under this apprehenſion, that God is preſent to them, that an holy and all-ſeeing eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked, to profane and pollute God's glorious name, by a trifling uſe of it in cuſtomary ſwearing and curſing. Whenever you ſin, you affront God to his face, and provoke omnipotent juſtice, which is at the door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the conſideration of this ſhould eſpecially deter us from ſecret ſins. This is the uſe the *Pſalmiſt* here makes it. If we believe that God *ſearcheth us and knows us*; *that he knows our down-ſitting and our up-riſing, and underſtands our thoughts afar off*; that *he compaſſeth our path*, and *our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways*; that *there is not a word in our tongue, but he knows it altogether*; that *he hath beſet us behind and before*; that *the darkneſs hideth not from him, but the night ſhineth as the day, and the darkneſs and light are both alike:* I ſay, if we believe this, how ſhould we live in an awful ſenſe of the majeſty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inſeparable from us, as we are from our ſelves, whoſe eye is upon us from the beginning of our lives to the end of our days! Did men believe that God is always with them, that his eye pierceth the darkneſs, and ſees through all thoſe clouds with which they hide and muffle themſelves, and pries into the moſt ſecret receſſes of their hearts: how would this check and reſtrain them from *deviſing miſchief in their hearts, or in their bed-chamber!* The holy preſence, and the pure eye of God would be to us a thouſand times more than to have our father, or our maſter, or our prince, or him whom we moſt revere, to ſtand by us. Did but men *repræſentare ſibi Deum, make God preſent to them*, by living under a continual ſenſe of his preſence, they would, as the expreſſion of the wiſe man is, *be in the fear of the Lord all day*, *Magna ſpes peccatorum tollitur, ſi peccaturis teſtis adſiſtat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus auctoritate etiam ſecretum ſuum ſanctius facit*; *The main hope of ſinners is to remain undiſcovered; let but ſomebody be privy to their deſigns, and they are utterly diſappointed: It is fit for the mind of a man to have an awe of ſome being, whoſe authority may render even its privacy more ſolemn.* This is the character of wicked men, *Pſal.* lxxxvi. 14. *That they have not God before their eyes.* One great cauſe of all the wickedneſs, and violence, and looſeneſs that is upon the earth, is, they do not believe that God is near them and ſtands by them.

And as the conſideration of God's preſence ſhould deter us from ſin, ſo it ſhould quicken and animate us to our duty. It is ordinarily a great encouragement to men to acquit themſelves handſomely, to have the eyes of men upon them, eſpecially of thoſe whoſe applauſe and approbation they value. God alone is *amplum theatrum*, he is *a greater theatre* than the world; and it ſhould be more to us that *he* ſtands by us, than if the eyes of all the world were fixed upon us. *Seneca* adviſeth it, as an excellent means to promote virtue, to propound to our ſelves, and ſet before our eyes ſome eminently virtuous perſon, as *Cato* or *Lælius*, *Ut ſic tanquam illo ſpectante vivamus, & omnia tanquam illo vidente faciamus: That we may live juſt as if he were looking upon us, and do all things juſt as if he beheld us.* How much greater incitement will it be to us, to think that God looks upon us, and ſees us, and really ſtands by us, than faintly to imagine the preſence of *Lælius* or *Cato?*

This ſhould have an influence upon all the duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who ſtands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to our ſelves. This *Cic.* in *l.* 2. *de leg.* looks upon as a great principle of religion, *Sit igitur hoc perſuaſum civibus, & qualis quiſque ſit, quid agat, quid in ſe admittat, qua mente, qua pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, & piorum impiorumque rationem habere: Let men be throughly perſuaded of this, that the Gods obſerve both the diſpoſition and the actions of every particular man, what he conſents to, what he allows himſelf in, particularly with what meaning, with what degree of inward devotion he performs his religious worſhip; and that they diſtinguiſh between the pious and the impious.*

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him. When we are in ſtraits, and difficulties and dangers, God is with us; when trouble is near to us, God is not far from us; where ever we are, how remote ſoever from friends and companions, we cannot be baniſhed from God's preſence; if we dwell *beyond the utmoſt parts of the ſea, there his hand leads us, and his right hand holds us.* Pſal. xvi. 8. *I have ſet the Lord always before me; becauſe he is at my right hand, I ſhall not be moved.* The conſideration of God's preſence is the great ſtay and ſupport of our faith. *Pſal.* xlvi. 1, 2. *God is our refuge and ſtrength, a very preſent help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midſt of the ſea.* In the greateſt commotions, and the moſt imminent and threatening dangers, this ſhould charm and allay our fears, that *God is a preſent help.*

This was the ſupport of *Moſes* his faith in his ſufferings, as the Apoſtle tells us, Heb. xi. 27. *He endured, as ſeeing him who is inviſible.*

To conclude all, whenever we are under any preſſure or trouble, we ſhould rebuke our own fears, and challenge our anxious thoughts with *David*, Pſal. xlii. 11. *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? and why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Truſt ſtill in God*; believe that God is with thee, and that omnipotent goodneſs ſtands by thee, who can and will ſupport thee, and relieve thee, and deliver thee when it ſeems beſt to his wiſdom.

SERMON CII.

The Eternity of God.

PSAL. XC. 2.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadſt formed the earth and the world, even from everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God.

THE *immenſity* and *eternity* of God, are thoſe attributes which relate to his nature, or manner of being. Having ſpoken of the former, I proceed to conſider the latter, from theſe words.

The title of this pſalm is, *The prayer of* Moſes, *the man of God.* He begins his prayer with the acknowledgment of God's providence to his people from the beginning of the world; *Lord, thou haſt been our dwelling-place from all generations; in generation and generation*; ſo the *Hebrew.* He was well acquainted with the hiſtory of the World, and the providence of God from the beginning of it; and as if he had ſpoken too little of God, in ſaying, that his providence had been exerciſed in all the ages of the world; he tells us here in the text, that he was before the world, and he made it; he was from all eternity, and ſhould continue to all eternity the ſame. *Before the mountains were brought forth*, the moſt firm and durable parts of the world, the moſt eminent and conſpicuous; *Or ever thou hadſt formed the earth and the world*; before any thing was created; *from everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God.* In ſpeaking of this attribute, I ſhall,

Firſt, Give you the explication of it.

Secondly, Endeavour to prove that it doth belong to God, and ought to be attributed to the divine nature.

Thirdly, Draw ſome corollaries from the whole.

Firſt, For the explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits: Now there are two limits of duration, *beginning* and *ending*; that which hath always been, is without beginning; that which always ſhall be, is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing always to have been, and the continuance of its being now to ceaſe, though there be no ſuch thing in the world: And there are ſome things which have had a beginning of their being, but ſhall have no end, ſhall always continue, as the angels and ſpirits of men. The firſt of theſe the ſchoolmen call eternity *à parte ante*, that is, *duration without beginning*; the latter, eternity *à parte poſt*, *a duration without ending*. But eternity, abſolutely taken, comprehends both theſe, and ſignifies *an infinite duration, which had no beginning, nor ſhall have any end*: ſo that when we ſay God is eternal, we mean that he always was, and ſhall be for ever; that he had no beginning of life, nor ſhall have any end of days; but that *he is from everlaſting to everlaſting*, as it is here in the text.

It is true indeed, that as to God's eternity *à parte ante*, as to his *having always been*, the ſcripture doth not give us any ſollicitous account of it; it only tells us in general, that God was *before the world was*, and that *he created it*: It doth not deſcend to gratify our curioſity, in giving us any account of what God did before he made the world, or how he entertained himſelf from all eternity: It doth not give us any diſtinct account of his *infinite duration*; for that had been impoſſible for our finite underſtandings to comprehend; if we ſhould have aſcended upward millions of ages, yet we ſhould never have aſcended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of infinity; therefore the ſcripture, which was wrote to inſtruct us in what was neceſſary, and not to ſatisfy our curioſity, tells us this, that God was *from everlaſting*, *before the world was made*, and *that he laid the foundations of it*.

So that by the *eternity* of God, you are to underſtand *the perpetual continuance of his being, without beginning or ending*,

I ſhall uot trouble you with the inconſiſtent and unintelligible notions of the ſchool-men; that it is *duratio tota ſimul*, in which we are not to conceive any ſucceſſion, but to imagine it an inſtant. We may as well conceive the *immenſity* of God to be *a point*, as his *eternity* to be an *inſtant*: And as, according to our manner of conceiving, we muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe the immenſity of God to be an infinite expanſion of his eſſence, a preſence of it to all places, and imaginable ſpace; ſo muſt we ſuppoſe the eternity of God to be a perpetual continuance, co-exiſtent to all imaginable ſucceſſion of ages. Now how that can be together, which muſt neceſſarily be imagined to be co-exiſtent to ſucceſſions? let them that can, conceive.

Secondly, For the proof of this, I ſhall attempt it *two* ways.

I. From the dictates of natural light and reaſon.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural reaſon. This attribute of God is of all other leaſt diſputed among the philoſophers: Indeed all agree that God is a perfect and happy being; but wherein that happineſs and perfection conſiſts, they differ exceedingly; but all agree, that God is *eternal*, and are agreed what *eternity* is, *viz. a boundleſs duration*: And however they did attribute a beginning to their *heroes* and *dæmons*, whence come the genealogies of their gods, yet the ſupreme God they looked upon as without beginning: And it is a good evidence, that this perfection doth clearly belong to God, that *Epicurus*, who had the loweſt and meaneſt conceptions of God, and robbed him of as many perfections as his imperfect

reaſon would let him, yet is forced to attribute this to him. *Tull. de Nat. Deor. lib.* 1. ſaith to the *Epicureans, Ubi igitur veſtrum beatum & æternum quibus duobus verbis ſignificatis Deum? Where then is your happy and eternal being, by which two epithets you expreſs God?* And *Lucretius*, who hath undertaken to repreſent to the world the doctrine of *Epicurus*, gives this account of the divine nature.

> *Omnis enim per ſe divum natura neceſſe eſt*
> *Immortali ævo ſumma cum pace fruatur.*

It is abſolutely neceſſary to the nature of the gods, to paſs an eternity in profound peace and quiet.

The poets, who had the wildeſt notions of God, yet they conſtantly give them the title of ἀθάνατοι; the heathen never mention the name of God, without this attribute, *Dii immortales! Immortal gods!* was their ordinary exclamation; and they ſwear conſtantly by this attribute, *deos teſtor immortales*; and to mention no more, *Tully* ſaith expreſly, *Nos Deum niſi ſempiternum intelligere qui poſſumus? How can we conceive of God, but as an eternal being.*

Now the reaſon of this is evident, becauſe it would be the greateſt imperfection we could attribute to his being; and the more perfect his being were otherwiſe, the greater imperfection would it be for ſuch a being to die; ſo excellent a nature to ceaſe to be; it would be an infinite abaſement to all his other perfections, his power, and wiſdom, and goodneſs, that theſe ſhould all be periſhing; nay, it would hinder ſeveral of his perfections, and contradict their very being: His *ſelf-exiſtence*; had he not *always* been, he had not been *of himſelf*; his *neceſſary exiſtence*; for that is not *neceſſarily*, which may at any time not be, or ceaſe to be what it is; and it would much abate the duty of the creature; we could not have that aſſurance of his promiſe, and that ſecurity of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his being, who ſhould be the diſpenſer of them, were uncertain.

Now theſe abſurdities and inconveniencies following from the denial of this perfection to God, is ſufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the perfections of God cannot be proved by way of *demonſtration*, but only by way of *conviction*, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the contrary.

II. From ſcripture and divine revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpoſe, which ſpeak of the *eternity* of God *directly*, and *by conſequence: By conſequence* thoſe words, 2 *Pet.* iii. 8. *One day with the Lord is as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day*; which words, however interpreters have troubled themſelves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this, That ſuch is the infinite duration of God, that all meaſures of time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain meaning, appears by *Pſal.* xc. out of which they are cited; *For a thouſand years in thy ſight are but as yeſterday, when it is paſt, and as a watch in the night*; that is, as the time paſt, as a few hours ſlept away, for that is the meaning of *a watch in the night*, that is as nothing. Now St. *Peter*'s converſion of the words, *one day is as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day*, only ſignifies this, that the longeſt duration of time is ſo inconſiderable to God, that it is as the ſhorteſt, that is, bears no proportion to the eternity of God.

But *directly*, the ſcripture frequently mentions this attribute: He is called the *everlaſting God*, Gen. xxi. 33. *The eternal God*, Deut. xxxiii. 27. and, which is to the ſame purpoſe, *he that inhabiteth eternity*, Iſa. lvii. 15. And this, as it is attributed to him in reſpect of his *being*, ſo in reſpect of all his *other perfections*, Pſal. ciii. 17. *The mercy of the Lord is from everlaſting to everlaſting.* Rom. i. 20. *his eternal power.* 1 Tim. i. 17. *the king eternal.* Thoſe doxologies which the ſcripture uſeth, are but acknowledgments of this attribute, *Bleſſed be the Lord for ever and ever*, Neh. ix. 5. *To whom be glory, and honour, and dominion for ever and ever*, Gal. i. 5. and in many other places.

Hither we may refer all thoſe places which ſpeak of him as *without beginning*; Pſal. xciii. 2. *Thou art from everlaſting.* Micah v. 2. *Whoſe goings forth have been from everlaſting.* Hab. i. 12. *Art not thou from everlaſting, O Lord!* And thoſe which ſpeak of the perpetual continuance of his duration, *Pſal.* cii. 24, 25, 26, 27.

Thy years are throughout all generations; of old thou haſt laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they ſhall periſh, but thou ſhalt endure; yea, all of them ſhall wax old like a garment, and as a veſture ſhalt thou change them, and they ſhall be changed; but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall have no end.

And thoſe which ſpeak of him as *the firſt and the laſt.* Iſa. xliii. 10. *Before me there was no God formed, neither ſhall there be any after me. I am the firſt, and I am the laſt, and beſides me there is no god.* And to mention no more, thoſe which ſpeak of his being, as co-exiſtent to all difference of time, paſt, preſent, and to come, *Rev.* i. 8. *I am Alpha, and Omega, the beginning, and the ending, ſaith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come.*

Thirdly, I ſhall from hence draw,

I. Some *doctrinal* corollaries.

II. Some *practical* inferences.

I. *Doctrinal* corollaries, that you may ſee how the perfections of God depend one upon another, and may be deduced one from another.

1. *Corol.* From the eternity of God, we may infer, that he is *of himſelf.* That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a cauſe of its being.

2. *Corol.* We may hence infer the *neceſſity* of his being. It is neceſſary every thing ſhould be, when it is; now that which is always, is abſolutely neceſſary, becauſe always ſo.

3. *Corol.* The *immutability* of the divine nature; for being always, he is neceſſarily; and being neceſſarily, he cannot but be what he is; a change of his being, is as impoſſible as a ceſſation. Therefore the *Pſalmiſt* puts his *immutability* and *eternity* together. *Pſal.* cii. 27. *But thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall have no end.*

II. By way of *practical* inference or application.

1. The conſideration of God's eternity may ſerve for the ſupport of our faith. This *Moſes* here uſeth as a ground of his faith; *Lord, thou haſt been our dwelling-place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth,* &c. Pſal. lxii. 8. *Truſt in him at all times, ye people.* His *immenſity* is an argument why all ſhould truſt in him, he is a *preſent help* to all; and why they ſhould truſt in him at all times, *his eternity* is an argument, *Deut.* xxxiii. 27. *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlaſting arms.* There are two attributes which are the proper objects of our faith and confidence, God's *goodneſs*, and his *power*, both theſe are eternal: *The goodneſs of the Lord endureth for ever*, as it is frequently in the *Pſalms*; and his power is eternal: the Apoſtle ſpeaks of his *eternal power*, as well as *godhead*, Rom. i. 20. Iſa. xxvi. 4. *Truſt ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.* Iſa. xl. 28. *The everlaſting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.*

We cannot truſt in men, becauſe there is nothing in man to be a foundation of our confidence; his good will towards us may change, his power may faint, and he may grow weary; or if theſe continue, yet they that have a mind and a power to help us, themſelves may fail: Therefore the *Pſalmiſt* uſeth this conſideration of men's mortality, to take us off from confidence in man, *Pſal.* cxlvi. 3, 4. *Put not your truſt in princes, nor in the ſon of man, in whom there is no help; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts periſh.* Iſa. ii. 22. *Ceaſe ye from man, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?* The greateſt of the ſons of men are but *lying refuges to the everlaſting God*; they are but *broken reeds* to the *rock of ages.*

And this may ſupport our faith, not only in reference to our own condition for the future, but in reference to our poſterity, and the condition of God's church to the end of the world. When we die, we may leave ours and the church in his hands, who *lives for ever*, and *reigns for ever.* The enemies of God's church, and thoſe who have the moſt malicious deſigns againſt it, whatever ſhare they may have in the affairs of the world, they can but domineer for a while, they muſt *die, and that very day their thoughts periſh: But thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.*

2. For the encouragement of our obedience. We ſerve the God who can give us an everlaſting reward. The reward of the next life is called *eternal life, an eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. iv. 17. *Eternal Salvation*, Heb. v. 9. *An eternal inheritance*, Heb. ix. 15. That place where good men ſhall be rewarded, is called *everlaſting habitations*, Luke xvi. 9. A *houſe eternal in the heavens*, 2 Cor. v. 1. As the promiſe of our

future reward is founded in the *goodneſs* of God, and the greatneſs of it in his power, ſo the duration of it in his *eternity*. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we ſerve him, and ſuffer for him, who *lives for ever*, and will make us happy for ever? When we ſerve the great men of this world, though we be ſecure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; and this diſcourageth many, and makes men worſhip the riſing ſun, and many times takes off mens eyes from the *king*, to his *ſucceſſor*; but he that ſerves God, ſerves *the king everlaſting*, as the Apoſtle calls him, who will live to diſpenſe rewards to all thoſe who are faithful to him.

3. For the terror of wicked men. The ſentence which ſhall be paſt upon men at the day of judgment, is called *eternal judgment*, Heb. vi. 2. becauſe it decides mens eternal ſtate; the puniſhment that ſhall follow this ſentence, which ſhall paſs upon the wicked, is called *everlaſting puniſhment*, Matth. xxv. 46. *Everlaſting fire*, Matth. xxv. 41. *Everlaſting deſtruction*, 2 Theſſ. i. 9. *The vengeance of eternal fire*, Jude 7. *The ſmoke of the bottomleſs pit*, is ſaid *to aſcend for ever and ever*, Rev. xiv. 11. and the wicked *to be tormented day and night, for ever and ever*, Rev. xx. 10. Now as the puniſhment of wicked men is founded in the *juſtice* of God, and the greatneſs of it in his *power*, ſo the perpetuity and continuance of it in his *eternity*. The Apoſtle ſaith, *Heb.* x. 31. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; becauſe he that *lives for ever, can puniſh for ever*; as the eternal demerit of ſin feeds, and animates, and keeps alive the never-dying worm, ſo the wrath of the eternal God blows up the eternal flame.

How ſhould this awaken in us a fear of *the eternal God!* Sinners, what a folly is it, for *the pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon*, to incenſe that juſtice which will puniſh and torment you *for ever!* As good men ſhall have *the everlaſting God* for their reward, and their happineſs, ſo wicked men ſhall have him for their judge and avenger.

We fear the wrath of men whoſe power is ſhort, and *whoſe breath is in their noſtrils*, who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Doſt thou fear *man that ſhall die, and the ſon of man that ſhall be made as graſs?* And is not the wrath of *the eternal God* much more terrible? *Luke* xii. 4, 5. *And I ſay unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom ye ſhall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to caſt into hell, yea, I ſay unto you, fear him.* The wrath of man is deſpicable, becauſe it hath bounds and limits; the fury of man can but reach to *the body*, it can go no farther; it expires with this life, it cannot follow us beyond the grave: But the wrath of *the eternal God* doth not only reach *the body*, but *the ſoul*; it is not confined to this life, but purſues us to the other world, and extends it ſelf to all eternity.

Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to caſt into hell, that is, to inflict eternal torments; *yea, I ſay unto you, fear him.*

SERMON

SERMON CIII.

The Incomprehenſibleneſs of GOD.

JOB XI. 7.

Canſt thou by ſearching find out God? Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection.

IN treating of the properties and perfections of God, I ſhall at preſent conſider that which reſults from the infinite excellency of his nature and perfection, compared with the imperfection of our underſtandings, which is commonly called the *incomprehenſibleneſs* of God. This you have expreſſed here in the words of *Zophar*, *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God?* &c.

There is no great difficulty in the words; *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God*, *poteſne perveſtigare intima Dei*, ſo *Caſtalio* tranſlates it. Doſt thou know God intimately, and thoroughly within and without? Canſt thou pierce into the center of his perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? and *Canſt thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* Canſt thou find out the Almighty, *uſque ad ultima*, to the very laſt and utmoſt of him? ſo as thou canſt ſay, after a thorough ſearch and enquiry, "There is "no perfection in God beyond this; there is nothing of him now that remains to be "known; *this* he is, and no other; *that* he is, and no otherwiſe; *this* he can do, "and no more; *hither* doth his knowledge, and power, and wiſdom reach, and no "farther."

Canſt thou do this? Theſe interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had ſaid, *No, thou canſt not*; *God is unſearchable, he is incomprehenſible.*

The two queſtions in the text ſeem to be only two ſeveral expreſſions of the ſame thing. The firſt queſtion is undoubtedly general, concerning the nature and perfections of God in general; *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God?* Canſt thou by the moſt diligent ſearch and enquiry come to a perfect knowledge and underſtanding of him?

The ſecond queſtion may ſeem to be a particular inſtance to the general truth implied in the firſt queſtion; he ſeems to inſtance in his power, as if he had ſaid, *God is unſearchable*, and then had inſtanced in a particular perfection, *the power of God*, *Canſt thou by ſearching find out God?* Thou canſt not comprehend the divine nature and perfections in general; *Canſt thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* Conſider particularly his *power*, and ſee if thou canſt know the utmoſt of that. But I rather think that the latter queſtion is altogether the ſame in ſenſe with the former; and that the attribute of *Almighty*, which is here given to God, is uſed by way of deſcription, and not intended by way of inſtance. *Canſt thou find out the Almighty*, that is, *God*, *unto perfection?* Which way ſoever we take the words, it is not much material, we may ground this *Obſervation* upon them:

That *God is incomprehenſible.*

This term or attribute is a relative term, and ſpeaks a relation between an object and a faculty, between God and a created underſtanding; ſo that the meaning of it is plainly this, That no created underſtanding can comprehend God, that is, have a perfect and exact knowledge of him, ſuch a knowledge as is adequate to the perfection of the object. Or thus, the nature and perfections of God are above the underſtanding of any of his creatures; it is only his own infinite underſtanding that can frame a perfect idea of his own perfection. God knows himſelf, his own underſtanding comprehends his own perfections. But he is *incomprehenſible to his creatures.*

Indeed, there is nothing more obvious than God; for *he is not far from every one of us*; *in him we live, and move, and have our being*; there needs no great ſearch to find out that there is a God: *An eternal power and deity are clearly ſeen in the things which are made*, as the Apoſtle tells us; but the *manner* of the being, and properties, and perfections of this God, theſe cannot be comprehended by a finite underſtanding. I ſhall prove the doctrine, and then apply it.

Firſt, for the proof it: I will attempt it theſe *three* ways:

I. By way of inſtance, or induction of particulars.

II. By way of conviction.

III. By giving the clear reaſon of it.

1. By way of inſtance. And I ſhall give you inſtances both on the part of the *Object*, and of the *Subject*; or the perſons who are capable of knowing God in any degree.

1. On the part of the *Object*. The nature of God, the excellency and perfection of God, the works and ways of God are above our thoughts and apprehenſions. The nature of God, it is vaſt and infinite, *Job*. xxxvi. 26. *God is great, and we know him not*, Job xxxvii. 23. *Touching the Almighty we cannot find him out*. Pſal. cxlv. 3. *His greatneſs is unſearchable.*

The excellencies and perfections of God; his immenſity, 2 *Chron*. ii. 6. *The heaven of heavens cannot contain him*: The eternity of his duration, *from everlaſting to everlaſting he is God*: We cannot imagine any limits of his preſence, nor bounds of his duration. The infiniteneſs of his knowledge, *Pſal*. cxlvii. 5. *His underſtanding is infinite.* When we think of the wiſdom and knowledge of God, our beſt way is to fall into admiration, *Rom*. xi. 35. *O the depth of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God!*

Whereas the ſcripture ſpeaks of thoſe perfections of God, which the creatures do in ſome meaſure and degree partake of, as his goodneſs, and power, and wiſdom, and holineſs, and immortality, it attributes them in ſuch a peculiar and divine manner to God, as doth exclude and ſhut out the creature from any claim, or ſhare, or title to them, *Matt*. xix. 16, 17. *Why calleſt thou me good? there's none good but one, that is God.* 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. *Who is the bleſſed and only potentate, who only hath immortality.* 1 Tim. i. 17. *The only wiſe God.* Rev. xv. 4. *For thou only art holy.* In ſo inconceivable a manner doth God poſſeſs theſe perfections which he communicates, and we can only underſtand them as he communicates them, and not as he poſſeſſes them; ſo that when we conſider any of theſe divine perfections, we muſt not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature, nor muſt we limit them by what they are in the creature, but ſay, the goodneſs and the wiſdom of God are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not able to comprehend; the tranſcendent degree, and the ſingularity of theſe divine perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The works of God; they are likewiſe unſearchable; *the works of creation* and of *redemption*. Job. v. 9. *Which doth great things, and unſearchable, marvellous things, paſt finding out.* And then he inſtanceth in the works of God, *Job* xxvi. 14. *Lo, theſe are part of his ways: But how little a portion is heard of him? and the thunder of his voice, who can underſtand?* So that he tells us expreſly, we cannot find out the works of God; we do but know part of them. The queſtion which he puts, *Job* xxxvii. 16. *Doſt thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?* can only be anſwered by the words of the Pſalmiſt, *Pſal*. civ. 24. *O Lord, how wonderful are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.* The work of *redemption*; in this there ſhines forth ſuch wiſdom, mercy, and love, as our underſtandings cannot reach. This work is called *the wiſdom of God in a myſtery*; *hidden wiſdom*, Σοφία ἀποκεκρυμμενη, 1 Cor. ii. 7. The mercy, and grace, and love of it is called, *the riches of God's mercy*, *the exceeding riches of his grace*, Eph. ii. 4, 7. Now riches is, when you cannot tell the utmoſt of them, *pauperes eſt numerare*. Eph. iii. 18, 19. *That ye may be able to comprehend with all ſaints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Chriſt, which paſſeth knowledge.* When we have the largeſt apprehenſions of this love, ſo that we think we comprehend it and know it, *it paſſeth knowledge*; yea, the effects of God's power and love, which he manifeſts in believers, are unſpeakable; for *he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly, above what we can aſk or think, according to the power which worketh in us*, Eph. iii. 20. The *peace* which guards their ſouls *paſſeth all underſtanding*, Phil. iv. 7. Thoſe *joys which fill their hearts are not to be expreſſed*, 1 Pet. i. 8. We read of *joy unſpeakable and full of glory*. The happineſs which they hope for is inconceivable; it is that which *eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man, which God hath laid up for us.*

The ways of God's providence, they are not to be traced, *Pſal.* lxxvii. 19. *Thy way is in the ſea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footſteps are not known.* Eccleſ. iii 11. *No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.* We are but *of yeſterday*, and know nothing. When we look upon God's providence, we take a part from the whole, and conſider it by it ſelf, without relation to the whole ſeries of his diſpenſation; we cannot ſee the whole of God's providence at one view, and never ſee from the beginning of the works of God to the end; therefore our knowledge of them muſt needs be very imperfect, and full of miſtakes, and falſe judgments of things; we cannot by our petty and ſhort-ſighted deſigns, judge of the works of God, and the deſigns of providence; for *our ways are not as his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, ſo are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts*, Iſa. lv. 8, 9. The ways of God's mercy, *Pſal.* ciii. *As the heavens are high above the earth, ſo great is God's mercy.* Pſal. cxxxix. 17, 18. *How precious are thy thoughts unto me? how great is the ſum of them? If I ſhould count them, they are more in number than the ſand.* And the ways of God's judgments, the ſeverity and greatneſs of his judgment is not known. *Pſal.* xc. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? And who may ſtand before thee when thou art angry?* And the reaſons of his judgments are unſearchable, *Pſal.* xxxvi. 6. *Thy judgments are a great deep.* Rom. xi. 33. *How unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways paſt finding out!* Theſe are the inſtances on the part of the *object*.

2. On the part of the *ſubject*, or the perſons capable of knowing God in any meaſure. The perfect knowledge of God is above a finite creature's underſtanding. Wicked men are ignorant of God, and full of falſe apprehenſions of him: The ſcripture gives this deſcription of them; they are thoſe that *know not God*, 2 *Theſſ.* i. Wicked men are ſo far from knowing God to perfection, that they have hardly any true knowledge of him; for as the man himſelf is, ſo will God ſeem to be to him; the idea and notions which men have of God, is but the picture of their own complection. To a true knowledge there is required likeneſs; a man's mind muſt be like the thing he would underſtand; therefore the Apoſtle tells us, *the natural* or *animal man, doth not receive the things of God*, he is not capable of them, becauſe his mind is unſuitable to them; he is πλήρης τοῦ Σώματος, *full of body*, and he cannot reliſh *ſpiritual things*; even thoſe natural notions which wicked men have of God, are ſtrangely tinctured and obſcured by the temper of the man; they are *lux ſepulta in opaca materia, light buried and hid in matter and darkneſs*, in the blackneſs of a foul and impure heart; ſo that there is no queſtion of *them*, whether they comprehend God or not.

But good men *cannot find out God*, they have ſome falſe apprehenſions of him; all their apprehenſions are dark, have much of obſcurity in them; they know God to *ſalvation*, but not to *perfection*. In this life we do but know God *in part*, that is, in compariſon of the knowledge which our natures are capable of.

But I will inſtance yet higher; the angels and the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, though they have *true* apprehenſions of God, yet they do not arrive to *perfect knowledge* of him, they cannot *perveſtigare ultima, know the utmoſt of God*; the cherubims themſelves are continually looking at the mercy-ſeat. To which the Apoſtle alludes, 1 *Pet.* i. 12. when he tells us the myſtery of God's mercy in the goſpel, as a thing *which the angels deſired to pry into.* In heaven, *that which is in part ſhall be done away*; that is, our knowledge ſhall be as perfect as our natures are capable; but it ſhall be *finite*. When we ſhall *ſee God face to face*; that is, have an immediate viſion of him, *and ſee him as he is*; that is, not having our underſtandings tinctured by any luſt or paſſion that may darken our minds, or miſrepreſent the *object*; for the Apoſtle tells us, *we ſhall ſee him, becauſe we ſhall be like him*; yet then we ſhall have ſhort and unadequate apprehenſions of him, we ſhall ſtill retain our limited natures and finite underſtandings.

II. By way of conviction. Doſt thou know perfectly the nature of a finite ſpirit, the perfection and the power of an angel, how, being immaterial, they can act upon matter, and move that which can make no reſiſtance to a ſpirit? Doſt thou know how they can move themſelves to a great diſtance in a moment, and dart themſelves from one part of the world to another? Doſt thou know how man is *formed in the loweſt parts of the earth*, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſeth it, and the curious frame of our bodies is wrought from ſuch rude principles in ſo dark a ſhop? Canſt thou give an account how the ſoul is united to the body, by what bands or holds a ſpirit is ſo cloſely and intimately conjoined to matter? Doſt thou know how thy ſelf underſtandeſt any thing, and canſt retain the diſtinct ideas and notions of ſo many objects without confuſion? Doſt thou know the leaſt parts of matter, how they are knit together; and by what cement they cleave ſo faſt to one another, that they can hardly be ſeparated?

Now if the creatures be ſo unſearchable, and the knowledge of theſe be too hard for thee, is not the Creator of them much more incomprehenſible, who poſſeſſeth all theſe perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a creature? If in natural and ſenſible things, *maxima pars eorum quæ ſcimus, eſt minima pars eorum quæ neſcimus*; how much more is it true of God, that *our ignorance is more than our knowledge*, when the whole earth and all the creatures bear no proportion to him? Iſa. xl. 15, 17. *Behold all the nations of the earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as the ſmall duſt of the ballance; all nations before him are nothing, and are accounted to him leſs than nothing.*

III. By ſhewing you the clear reaſon of it, which is this, the diſproportion between the faculty and the object, the finiteneſs of our underſtandings, and the infiniteneſs of the divine nature and perfections. *God is greater than our hearts*; and therefore as he knows more than we do, as the Apoſtle reaſons, 1 *John* iii. 20. ſo he is more than can be known by us; he is too vaſt an object for our underſtanding to entertain, for our minds to receive. Thou may'ſt as well mete out the heaven with a ſpan, and meaſure the waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the duſt of the earth in a little urn, and weigh the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a little ballance, as think to circumſcribe God in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compaſs of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vaſtneſs and greatneſs of the object, but the glory and reſplendency of it does ſo dazzle our ſight, that we cannot perfectly ſee it, 1 Tim. vi. 16. *He dwelleth in light, which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath ſeen, nor can ſee.* As God is too big, ſo he is too bright an object for our underſtandings; the preſence of his glory overpowers our minds, and bears down our faculties, and conquers our underſtandings.

I come now to apply this doctrine of the incomprehenſibleneſs of the divine nature. If the nature, and perfections, and ways, and works of God be incomprehenſible, and paſt finding out;

I. It calls for our admiration, and veneration, and reverence. Theſe are the beſt apprehenſions of him that is incomprehenſible; a ſilent veneration of his excellencies, is the beſt acknowledgment of them. We muſt admire what we cannot apprehend or expreſs, *Zach.* ix. 17. *How great is his goodneſs, and how great is his beauty?* The beſt way to celebrate the praiſes of God, is that which *Nehemiah* uſeth, *Nehem.* ix. 5. *And bleſſed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all bleſſing and praiſe.* Whenever we ſpeak or think of God, we neceſſarily detract from his perfections; but even this neceſſity is glorious to him, and this ſpeaks his perfection, that the higheſt finite underſtanding muſt have imperfect thoughts of him.

We ſhould make up in reverence and veneration what we fall ſhort of in knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of diſtance; by our reverence of the divine majeſty, we ſhould beſt awe our hearts, in a ſenſe of the diſtance which is between his infinite nature and perfection, and our finite apprehenſions. Wordly greatneſs will cauſe wonder, the thoughts of earthly majeſty will compoſe us to reverence; how much more ſhould thoſe excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine? *Iſa.* vi. you have there God repreſented *ſitting upon his throne*, and the *ſeraphims about him*, which are deſcribed to us as *having each ſix wings, and with twain they cover their faces.* Creatures of the brighteſt underſtanding, and the moſt exalted purity and holineſs, *cover their faces* in the preſence of God's glory; they chuſe rather to venerate God, than look upon him.

II. This calls for humility and modeſty. The conſideration of God's unſearchable perfections ſhould make *the haughtineſs of man to ſtoop and bring down his proud looks, and*

and God alone ſhould be exalted. The thought of God's excellency ſhould abaſe us, and make us *vile in our own eyes*; it ſhould make all thoſe petty excellencies that we pride our ſelves in, to vaniſh and diſappear. *Thoſe treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge* which are in God, ſhould *hide pride from man:* It ſhould hide thoſe little parts and gifts which we are ſo apt to glory in, as the ſun hides the ſtars. When we conſider God, we ſhould be ſo far from admiring our ſelves, that we ſhould, with an humble thankfulneſs, wonder that God ſhould regard ſuch inconſiderable nothings as we are. *Pſal.* viii. 1, 3, 4. *O Lord our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who haſt ſet thy glory above the heavens! When I conſider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the ſtars which thou haſt ordained*; *what is man that thou art mindful of him? or the ſon of man, that thou viſiteſt him?* He that conſiders the glory of God, and the greatneſs of his works, will think ſo meanly of himſelf, that he will be aſtoniſhed that God ſhould mind him or viſit him. This a noble ſtrain of humility in *David*, by which he ackowledgeth that the greateſt king of the earth, how conſiderable ſoever he may be in reſpect of men, is yet but a pitiful thing to God.

When we ſpeak to God, we ſhould do it with great humility. *Eccleſ.* v. 2, 3. *Let thy words be few, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth.* We ſhould ſay to God, *Job* xxxvii. 19. *Teach us what we ſhall ſay unto thee, for we cannot order our ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs:* And when we think or ſpeak of him, we ſhould do it with great modeſty; we ſhould not raſhly pronounce or determine any thing concerning God. *Simonides* being aſked what God was, deſired one day's time to conſider; then he deſired two, and then four. The more we think of God, the leſs peremptory ſhall we be in defining him. He that conſiders that God is incomprehenſible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmoſt of infinite power, and all the reaſons of God's ways and providences. He that rightly values his own ſhort underſtanding, and the unlimited perfections of God, will not be apt to ſay, this God cannot do, this he cannot know, ſuch ways are not agreeable to his wiſdom. He that knows God and himſelf, will be modeſt in theſe caſes, he will ἐπὲχειν, abſtain from all peremptory pronouncing in theſe matters; he conſiders that one man many times differs ſo much from another in knowledge and ſkill of working, that he can do thoſe things which another believes impoſſible: But we have pitiful thoughts of God, if we think the difference between one man and another, is any thing to the vaſt diſtance that is between the divine underſtanding and our ignorance, the divine power and our weakneſs, the wiſdom of God and the folly of men.

III. The incomprehenſibleneſs of God's perfections calls for the higheſt degree of our affection. How ſhould we fear this great and glorious God! *Pſal.* xc. 11. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath.* Fear is the moſt infinite of all our paſſions, and fills us with the moſt endleſs jealouſy and ſuſpicions: God's wrath is greater than our fear; *according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath.*

How ſhould we love him, when we are aſtoniſhed with admiration of God's goodneſs, and ſay, *How great is thy goodneſs, and how great is thy beauty? Behold, what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed upon us!* How great ſhould our love be to him! what manner of love ſhould we return to him!

This calls for the higheſt degree of our faith. With what confidence ſhould we rely upon him, *who is able to do for us exceeding above what we can aſk or think!*

To conclude. This requires the higheſt degree of our ſervice: How ſhould our hearts be *enlarged to run the way of his commandments*, who hath *laid up for us* ſuch things, *that eye* hath *not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man?*

SERMON CIV.

God the firſt Cauſe, and laſt End.

ROM. XI. 36.

For of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

HAVING conſidered the more eminent and abſolute perfections of the divine nature, as alſo that which reſults from the infinite excellency and perfection of God, compared with the imperfection of our underſtandings, I come in the laſt place to treat of ſuch as are merely and purely *relative*; as that he is *the firſt cauſe, and the laſt end* of all things, to which purpoſe I have choſen theſe words of the Apoſtle for the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe, *For of him, and through him*, &c.

The dependance of theſe words upon the former, is briefly this. The Apoſtle had been ſpeaking before in this chapter, ſeveral things that might tend to raiſe us to an admiration of the wiſdom, and goodneſs, and mercy of God in the diſpenſation of his grace for the ſalvation of men, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and therefore would have us aſcribe this work wholly to God; the contrivance of it to his wiſdom, and not to our own counſels, *ver.* 34. *For who hath known the mind of the Lord; and who hath been his counſellor?* And the beſtowing this grace, to his free goodneſs and mercy, and not to any deſert of ours, *ver.* 35. *Or who hath firſt given to him, and it ſhall be recompenſed to him again?* Yea, and not only in the diſpenſation of grace, but of all good things; not only in this work of redemption, but alſo of creation, God is the fountain and original, and *firſt cauſe*, from whence every thing proceeds; and *the laſt end*, to which every thing is to be referred; *For of him*, &c. ἐξ ἀυτȣ̃, *from him*, the efficient cauſe producing all things, δὶ ἀυτȣ̃, *by* or *through him*, as the efficient conſerving cauſe of all things; καὶ εις ἀυτὸν, *and to him*, as the final cauſe of all things, and the end for which they were made.

The propoſition I ſhall ſpeak to, is, that God is *the firſt cauſe*, and *laſt end.*

Firſt, I ſhall a little explain the terms.
Secondly, Confirm the propoſition.
Thirdly, Apply it.

Firſt, For the explication of the terms.

I. That God is the *firſt cauſe*, ſignifies,

1. Negatively, That he had no cauſe, did not derive his being from any other, or does depend upon any other being; but that he was always, and eternally of himſelf.

2. Poſitively, that he is *the cauſe* of all things beſides himſelf, the fountain and original of all created beings, from whom all things proceed, and upon whom all things depend; or, that I may uſe the expreſſion of St. *John*, John i. 3. which I know is appropriated to the ſecond perſon in the Trinity, *By him all things were made, and without him was nothing made, that was made.* So that when we attribute to God, that he is the *firſt*, we mean, that there was nothing before him, and that he was before all things, and that all things are by him.

II. *The laſt end*, that is, that all things refer to him; that is, the deſign and aim of all things that are made, is the illuſtration of God's glory ſome way or other, and the manifeſtation of his perfections.

Secondly, For the confirmation, I ſhall briefly, according to my uſual method, attempt it theſe *two* ways.

1. By natural light. The notion of a God contains in it all poſſible perfection. Now the utmoſt perfection we can imagine, is, for a being to be always of it ſelf, before all other beings; and not only ſo, but to be the cauſe of all other beings; that is, that their ſhould be nothing but what derives its being from him, and continually depends upon him; from whence follows, that all things muſt refer to him as their *laſt end*. For every wiſe agent acts with deſign, and in order to an end. Now the end is that which is beſt, which is moſt worthy the attaining, and that is God himſelf. Now his being and perfections are already; and the beſt, next to the *exiſtence* of his being and perfections, is the *manifeſtation* of them, which is called God's glory; and this is the higheſt end that we can imagine, to which all the effects of the divine power, and goodneſs, and wiſdom, do refer.

And that theſe titles are to be attributed to God, is not only reaſonable, when it is revealed and diſcovered, but was diſcovered by the natural light of the heathens. Hence it was that *Ariſtotle* gave God thoſe titles of *the firſt being, the firſt cauſe, and the firſt mover*; and his maſter *Plato* calls God *the author and parent of all things, the maker and architect of the world, and of all creatures; the fountain and original of all things*. Porphyry *calls him* τὸ ϖρῶτον, *the firſt*; from whence he reaſons to this ſenſe, that *he is the ultimate end, and that all things move towards God; that all motions center in him*; *becauſe*, ſaith he, *it is moſt proper and natural for things to refer to their original, and to refer all to him from whom they receive all. Antoninus*, the emperor and philoſopher, ſpeaking of *nature* (which with the *Stoicks* ſignifies God) had theſe words, which are ſo very like theſe of the Apoſtle, that they may ſeem to be taken from him; ἐκ σοῦ ϖάντα, ἐν σοὶ ϖάντα, εἰς σὲ ϖάντα; *Of thee are all things; in thee are all things; to thee are all things.*

II. From ſcripture. Hither belong all thoſe places where he declares himſelf to be *the firſt and the laſt*. Iſa. xli. 4. *Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the firſt, and with the laſt, I am he.* Iſa. xliii. 10. *Before me there was no God formed*, (or as it is in the margin) *there was nothing formed of God, neither ſhall there be after me*. Iſa. xliv. 6. *I am the firſt, and I am the laſt, and beſides me there is no God.* Iſa. xlviii. 12, 13. *I am the firſt; I am alſo the laſt, my hand hath laid the foundation of the earth; my right hand hath ſpread the heavens:* which is as much as to ſay, he hath made the world, and was *the firſt cauſe* of all things. Rev. i. 8. *I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, ſaith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come.*

But more expreſly, 1 Cor. viii. 6. *But to us there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we by him*, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτὸν, *and we to him, and for him.* Acts xvii. 24. *God, that made the world, and all things therein.* Ver. 25. *He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.* Ver 28. *In him we live, and move, and have our being.* Ver. 29. *Foraſmuch then as we are the off-ſpring of God.*

Hither we may refer thoſe texts which attribute the ſame to the ſecond perſon in the Trinity, as the eternal wiſdom and word of God, whereby all things were made, *John* i. 3. *All things were made by him, and without him was nothing made that was made.* Ver. 10. *And the world was made by him.* 1 Cor. viii. 6. *And one Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by whom are all things, and we by him.* Eph. iii. 9. *God, who created all things by Jeſus Chriſt.* Col. i. 16. *By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, viſible and inviſible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things conſiſt.* Heb. i. 2. *By whom alſo he made the worlds.* And, ver. 3. *Upholding all things by the word of his power.*

Thirdly, And laſty, to apply this doctrine.

Uſe. Firſt, If God be the *firſt cauſe* of all things, who did at firſt produce all creatures, and does ſince preſerve them, and govern them, and diſpoſeth of all their concernments, and orders all things that befal them. From hence let us learn,

1. With humility and thankfulneſs to own and acknowledge, and admire, and bleſs God as the author and original of our being, as the ſpring and fountain of all the bleſſings and good things that we enjoy. If we do but conſider what theſe words ſignify, that God is the *firſt cauſe* of all things, we ſhall ſee great reaſon to

own and acknowledge, to adore and praiſe him, and that with the greateſt humility, becauſe we have not given him any thing, but have received all from him; he is the cauſe of all things, who did freely, and of his own good will and pleaſure communicate being to us, without any conſtraint or neceſſity, but what his own goodneſs laid upon him. *Rev.* iv. 11. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou haſt created all things, and for thy pleaſure they are and were created.* We could not before we were, deſerve any thing from him, or move him by any argument, or importune him by intreaties to make us; but he freely gave us being, and ever ſince we depend upon him, and have been preſerved by him, and cannot ſubſiſt one moment without the continued influence of the power and goodneſs which firſt called us out of nothing. He is the author of all the good, and the fountain of all thoſe bleſſings which for the preſent we enjoy, and for the future hope for.

When he made us at firſt, he deſigned us for happineſs, and when we by our ſin and wilful miſcarriage, fell ſhort of the happineſs which he deſigned us for, he ſent his Son into the world for our recovery, and gave his life for the ranſom of our ſouls. He hath not only admitted us into a new covenant, wherein he hath promiſed pardon and eternal life to us; but he hath alſo purchaſed theſe bleſſings for us by the moſt endearing price the blood of his own Son, and hath ſaved us in ſuch a manner as may juſtly aſtoniſh us. Upon theſe conſiderations we ſhould awaken our ſelves to the praiſe of God, and with the holy *Pſalmiſt*, call up our ſpirits, and ſummon all the powers and faculties of our ſouls to aſſiſt us in this work. *Pſal.* ciii. 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. *Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and all that is within me bleſs his holy name; bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diſeaſes, who redeemeth thy life from deſtruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindneſs and tender mercies*; it is he that *ſatisfies our ſouls with good things*, that hath promiſed eternal life and happineſs to us, and muſt confer and beſtow this upon us; *Therefore our ſouls, and all that is within us,* ſhould *bleſs his holy name.*

2. If God be the *firſt cauſe*, that is, orders all things that befal us, and by his providence diſpoſeth of all our concernments, this ſhould teach us with patience and quietneſs to ſubmit to all events, to all evils and afflictions that come upon us, as being diſpoſed by his wiſe providence, and coming from him: We are apt to attribute all things to the next and immediate agent, and to look no higher than ſecond cauſes, not conſidering that all the motions of natural cauſes are directly ſubordinate to the firſt cauſe; and all the actions of free creatures are under the government of God's wiſe providence, ſo that nothing happens to us beſides the deſigns and intention of God.

And methinks this is one particular excellency of the ſtile of the ſcripture above all other books, that the conſtant phraſe of the ſacred dialect is to attribute all events (excepting ſins only) to God; ſo that every one that reads it, cannot but take notice that it is wrote with a more attentive conſideration of God than any other book, as appears by thoſe frequent and expreſs acknowledgments of God as the cauſe of all events; ſo that what in other writers would be ſaid to be done by this or that perſon, is aſcribed to God. Therefore it is ſo often ſaid, that *the Lord did* this and that, ſtirred up ſuch an enemy, brought ſuch a judgment. And we ſhall find that holy men in ſcripture make excellent uſe of this conſideration, to argue themſelves into patience and contentedneſs in every condition. So *Eli*, 1 Sam. iii. 18. *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.* So *Job*, he did not ſo conſider the *Sabæans* and *Chaldeans*, who had carried away his oxen and his camels, and ſlain his ſervants; nor the wind which had thrown down his houſe, and killed his ſons and his daughters; but he looks up to God, the great governour and diſpoſer of all theſe events; *The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away, bleſſed be the name of the Lord.* So *David*, Pſal. xxxix. 9. *I was dumb, and ſpake not a word becauſe thou, Lord, didſt it.* So our bleſſed Saviour, when he was ready to ſuffer, he did not conſider the malice of the *Jews*, which was the cauſe of his death, but looks to a higher hand; *the cup which my father gives me to drink, ſhall not I drink it?*

He that looks upon all things as coming from ſecond cauſes, and does not eye the firſt cauſe, the good and wiſe governour, will be apt to take offence at every croſs and unwelcome accident. Men are apt to be angry, when one flings water upon them as they paſs in the ſtreets; but no man is offended if he is wet by rain from heaven. When we look upon evils as coming only from men, we are apt to be impatient, and know not how to bear them; but we ſhould look upon all things as under the government and diſpoſal of the firſt cauſe, and the circumſtances of every condition as allotted to us by the wiſe providence of God; this conſideration, that it is the hand of God, and that he hath done it, would ſtill all the murmurings of our ſpirits. As when a ſeditious multitude is in an uproar, the preſence of a grave and venerable perſon will huſh the noiſe, and quell the tumult; ſo if we would but repreſent God as preſent to all actions, and governing and diſpoſing all events, this would ſtill and and appeaſe our ſpirits, when they are ready to riot and mutiny againſt any of his diſpenſations.

Uſe the ſecond. If God be *the laſt end* of all, let us make him our laſt end, and refer all our actions to his glory. This is that which is due to him, as he is *the firſt cauſe*, and therefore he does moſt reaſonably require it of us.

And herein likewiſe the ſcripture doth excel all other books, that is, doth more frequently and expreſly mind us of this end, and calls upon us to propoſe it to our ſelves as our ultimate aim and deſign. We ſhould love him as our chief end, *Mat.* xxii. 37. *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind.* Thus to love God, is that which in the language of the ſchools is loving God as our *chief end.* So likewiſe the Apoſtle requires, that we ſhould refer all the actions of our lives to this end. 1 *Cor.* x. 31. *Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God*; that we ſhould *glorify him in our ſouls, and in our bodies, which are his.* He is the author of all the powers that we have, and therefore we ſhould uſe them for him; we do all *by* him, and therefore we ſhould do all *to* him.

And that we may the better underſtand our ſelves as to this duty, I ſhall endeavour to give ſatisfaction to a queſtion or two, which may ariſe about it.

Firſt, Whether an actual intention of God's glory be neceſſary to make every action that we do, good and acceptable to God?

Anſ. 1. It is neceſſary that the glory of God, either *formally* or *virtually*, ſhould be the ultimate end and ſcope of our lives, and all our actions; otherwiſe they will be defective in that which in moral actions is moſt conſiderable, and that is *the end.* If a man ſhould keep all the commandments of the goſpel, this excepted, of making God's glory his ſupreme end, only with a deſign to gain reputation, or ſome other advantage in the world; this very thing would vitiate all, and render him unacceptable to God.

2. It is very requiſite and convenient, as a good ſign, that we ſhould very frequently, actually think upon, and intend this end; for if it be very much out of our thoughts, we have ſome reaſon to be jealous of our ſelves, that we do not intend it at all.

3. It is ſo far from being neceſſary, that we ſhould in every action have this intention of God's glory, that it is not morally poſſible that we ſhould, no more than it is poſſible, that a man that goes a journey of a thouſand miles, ſhould every ſtep he takes have actual thoughts of his journey's end, nor is it more neceſſary; for conſideration of the end, is only ſo far neceſſary, as it is neceſſary to guide and quicken us in the uſe of means; as it is not neceſſary for a man to think of his journey's end, farther than to direct and excite him to go thither. And this appears farther by the contrary; it is not neceſſary to make a ſinful action, that a man ſhould *formally*, much leſs *actually* intend God's diſhonour; it is enough to conſtitute a man a wicked man, if he willingly tranſgreſs God's law, the doing whereof does by conſequence reflect a diſhonour upon him; ſo, on the other hand, it is ſufficient to make an action good and acceptable, if it be conformable to God's law, and ſuch as by conſequence redounds to God's glory.

Second queſtion. Whether the glory of God may, or ought to be conſidered, as an end ſeparate and diſtinct from our own happineſs?

Anſw. I ſhall ſpeak but briefly to this, becauſe I have elſewhere ſpoken to it; but in that little which I have to ſay for ſatisfaction to this queſtion, I will proceed by theſe ſteps.

I. By the glory of God, we mean the demonſtration, or illuſtration, or manifeſtation of ſome or all of his perfections, more eſpecially his goodneſs, and mercy, and juſtice, and wiſdom, and power, and holineſs.

II. It is plain, that the manifeſtation of ſome of theſe perfections is a thing that may be ſeparated from the happineſs of a creature; for his holineſs, and juſtice, and power, may, and ſhall be manifeſted in the final and eternal ruin of impenitent ſinners.

III. The manifeſtation of any of God's perfections, ought many times to be propounded by us as an end diſtinct and ſeparate from our reſpective happineſs; ſuch a happineſs as reſpects only ſome particulars, and ſome particular duration, in oppoſition to abſolute and eternal happineſs. In this ſenſe our Saviour ſays, that he *ſought not his own glory, but the glory of him that ſent him:* by which he does not mean, that he quitted everlaſting glory and happineſs; but that, in order to the glory of God, he did for a time lay aſide his own glory, and diveſt himſelf of it while he was in this world; for the Apoſtle tells us, that he was encouraged to do this out of a reſpect to a greater glory. *Heb.* xii. 2. *Who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the throne of God.* And in this ſenſe we are to underſtand the command of ſelf-denial in the goſpel, with reference to our particular or temporal, not our eternal intereſt; and that it is no more, is plain from the argument our Saviour uſes to encourage this ſelf-denial, the promiſe of a far greater happineſs than that we deny, no man that *forſakes father or mother for my ſake,* but ſhall *have eternal life:* And proportionably we are to underſtand thoſe commands of loving Chriſt more than our ſelves, that is, more than any temporal intereſt.

IV. The manifeſtation of any of God's perfections, neither ought, nor can reaſonably be propounded by us, as an end ſeparated from, or oppoſite to our eternal bleſſedneſs; that is, we cannot *naturally or reaſonably* deſire the glory of God ſhould be advanced, though it were to our final ruin, either by *annihilation or eternal miſery.*

1. We cannot either *naturally* or *reaſonably* deſire God ſhould be glorified by our *annihilation.*

(1.) Not *naturally.* Becauſe ſuch a deſire would be directly contrary to the natural deſire of ſelf-preſervation, which God himſelf hath planted in us, and is moſt intimate and eſſential to our nature.

(2.) Not *reaſonably.* Becauſe it is utterly unimaginable how God can be glorified by the annihilation of a creature. All the attributes that we can imagine can be manifeſted herein, are power and ſovereignty; his power hath already been as much manifeſted in creating and making the creature out of nothing, as it can be by reducing it into nothing; for to create, is the very ſame demonſtration of power as to annihilate. And as for his ſovereignty, God will never manifeſt that in contradiction to his goodneſs, or wiſdom, or any other perfection of the divine nature. To unmake a creature, and take away the being which he had given, would argue either a failure of his goodneſs toward the creature, or that he did repent he had made it, which would reflect upon his wiſdom and conſtancy. I do not ſay, that in juſtice God cannot annihilate a creature; far be it from me: for what he gave was his own, and he might without any wrong to the creature take it again.

2. Much leſs can we *naturally* deſire that God ſhould be glorified in our *eternal miſery.* The reaſons which I give about *annihilation* are ſtronger here; therefore we cannot *naturally* deſire it, nor *reaſonably,* for the demonſtration of his power, or ſovereignty, or juſtice, or holineſs, which I think are all the attributes which we can imagine to be glorified hereby: Not as the manifeſtation of his power, for that would be as much manifeſted in the happineſs, as miſery of the creature: Not of his ſovereignty; for God will not manifeſt that in contradiction to his goodneſs, upon which nothing can reflect more, than *merely, pro arbitrio, for his pleaſure,* to make an innocent creature for ever miſerable: Not his juſtice, and holineſs; for theſe pre-ſuppoſe ſin and demerit in the creature, out of hatred to which he makes it miſerable; but God hath declared that he eſteems himſelf more glorified by the obedience and happineſs of his creatures, than by their ſin and deſtruction; and if it were reaſonable to deſire the juſtice and holineſs of God might be glorified in my eternal ruin, which I have deſerved by ſin; this would plainly follow from it, that it were reaſonable *to ſin, that juſtice might abound,* which of the two is a greater abſurdity than that which the Apoſtle condemns of *ſinning, that grace may abound.*

V. There is a ſtrict and inviolable connexion between the greater glory of God and our obedience and happineſs; I ſay, between his greateſt glory, becauſe he eſteems himſelf more glorified by the obedience and happineſs of his creatures, than by their ruin and miſery: and that we may believe it, we have his oath for it; *As I live, ſaith the Lord, I delight not in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn and live.* And it is obſervable, that the Apoſtle, in 1 *Cor.* x. 31, 32, 33. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatſoever ye do, do all to the glory of God; giving none offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God, even as I pleaſe all men, in all things, not ſeeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be ſaved;* explains *the glorifying of God, by edifying and promoting the ſalvation of others.*

VI. We may conſider the glory of God, as ſome ways diſtinct from our happineſs; that is, we may conſider the manifeſtation of his goodneſs, and mercy, and wiſdom, in our happineſs, as that which reſults from it; but this is not enough to make it a diſtinct end, but the ſame diverſly conſidered; as the publick good is that which reſults from the general good of particular perſons, but cannot reaſonably be propounded by any man, as an end diſtinct from the general happineſs of particular perſons, without ruining and deſtroying the notion of publick good.

VII. Though conſidered as we are particular beings, we can have no greater end than our own happineſs, in which God is eminently glorified; yet as we are part of the whole creation and workmanſhip of God, which is the nobleſt conſideration of our ſelves, the glory of God, which reſults from the manifeſtation of all his perfections in and about his creatures, is preciſely our ultimate end, and yet not an end really diſtinct from our own happineſs; and therefore it is moſt proper, and becoming, and agreeable to the wiſe ſtyle of ſcripture, to give our end its denomination, not from the more particular and narrow, but the more noble conſideration of our ſelves, as we are parts of the whole creation and workmanſhip of God; as it is more generous and becoming for the members of a civil ſociety to mention the publick good as their end, than their private happineſs and advantage, though that be ſo really and effectually promoted by the publick good.

Thus I have finiſhed what I propoſed on this argument, and concerning the attributes of God in general; *Of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things. To him be glory for ever.* Amen.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

FINIS.